Ariosto's Pathway to Posterity by Ann Mullaney

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1. Introduction

Ludovico Ariosto faced a cultural landscape peppered with explosive issues, yet he managed to pursue a path to posterity. In the mid-nineteenth century, statesman Vincenzo Gioberti extolled Ariosto's praises, declaring him divine, the prince of heroic poetry second only to Dante.[1] Although we might use different terminology, most of us here today do think of Ariosto as close to Dante in greatness. How Ariosto attained and maintained his status as the best known poet of the Italian Renaissance is a vast subject. In *Proclaiming a Classic*, Daniel Javitch laid out the trajectory taken by the *Orlando furioso* in becoming legitimized through sixteenth century commentaries.[2] I would like to explore aspects of Ariosto's writings which could continue to create impediments to his glory but do not: the focus will be on matters of religion, patronage, and language as it relates to the burlesque code so popular in its day. I will cite other writers of the era to provide context for the positions taken by Ariosto.

Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533): a small sampling of images associated with his works, Google images.

[1] Vincenzo Gioberti, "Prossimo all'unico Dante (e chi potria pareggiarlo?), e a niun altro secondo, per la grandezza dell'ingegno, la sublimità e varietà delle imagini, la ricchezza, la spontaneità, la grazia maravigliosa dello stile e della poesia, è Lodovico Ariosto, cui la patria unanime chiamò divino e salutò come principe della cantica eroica," *Orlando furioso*, Introduction, p. v.

[2] Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of* Orlando furioso. Princeton UP, 1991.

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2. Religion, patronage and genre

One could say that in the fictional realm of the *Orlando furioso*, Ariosto took a somewhat traditional stance on religion: he set his epic in the time of Charlemagne when Moors had invaded France, and throughout the work Christian knights battle pagan knights. The author insists that Christian knights should be trying to win back the Holy Lands, which are in the hands of dogs (17.73.8 and 15.99.7-8). Christian knights should not be fighting other Christians in Europe which is already Christ's domain. Exhortations to Christian warriors reach a crescendo in Canto 17, where the authorial voice asks succinctly:

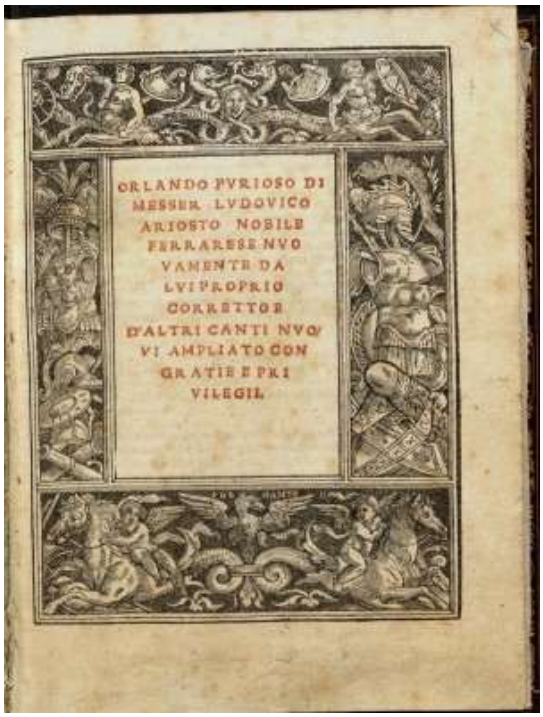
> Se Cristianissimi esser voi volete,
> e voi altri Catolici nomati,
> perché di Cristo gli uomini uccidete?
> Perché dei beni loro son dispogliati?
> Perché Ierusalem non riavete,
> che tolto è stato a voi da' rinegati?
> Perché Costantinopoli e del mondo
> la miglior parte occupa il Turco immondo? (*OF* 17.75)
>
> ("If you wish to be called Most Christian, if you wish to be called Catholic, why do you kill Christ's men? Why despoil them of their possessions? Why do you not retake Jerusalem, seized from you by renegades? Why is Constantinople and the better part of the world occupied by unclean Turks?," translation by G. Waldman, pp. 185-6.)

The lack of political correctness emerging from the authorial voice is provocative: when the pagan Dardinel seeks to avenge his bosom friend he prays to Mohammed, and the narrator comments, "s'udir lo puote," that is "if [Mohammed] can hear him," (18.55.2). This deafness on the part of Mohammed is alluded to again during the battle of Biserta [now in Tunisia]. The Christians, led by Astolfo and Orlando, warn the inhabitants that their city will be besieged in three days, then they begin a pre-battle fast. Meanwhile the Muslim priests of Biserta join their flock in prayer for deliverance; they beat their breasts, weep copiously and call out to their Mohammed who hears nothing ("chiamano il lor Macon che nulla sente," 40.13.1-4). However, in the midst of the stupendous description of the assault on Biserta, Ariosto tempers the smugness of his Christian audience: first, he compares the onrush of Christians through the breached walls of the North African city to the haughty river Po flooding Mantuan plains and carrying away fields and huts, shepherds and dogs (40.31). So, in this comparison, the invading Christian soldiers are portrayed as neither better nor worse than a river running riot. Next, in describing the devastation caused there by the Christians, the poet uses words for criminal activities: "Omicidio, rapina e man violente/ nel sangue e ne l'aver" (homicide, robbery and violence in blood and in greed, 40.32.5-6). Christian soldiers burn palaces, porticoes and mosques. They steal silver taken from the ancient pagan

gods. What is worse, [Muslim] children and mothers become objects of rapes (*stupri*), rapes which Orlando and Astolfo both know are going on but cannot prevent.[3]

Ariosto's authorial voice admits to serious crimes on the part of Christian soldiers, and in other passages can be heard lightly mocking basic Christian beliefs. There is amused scoffing at the traditional image of hell when Astolfo chases off harpies who enter a grotto: when he hears cries and yells he recognizes the place as hell ("da pianti e d'urli e da lamento eterno:/ segno evidente quivi esser lo 'inferno," 34.4.4-8). Contrast this with the fate of Lydia, who, in an extended parody of a Dantesque encounter, tells how she has been condemned to infernal smoke by the loftiest judgment of God for having been unpleasant and ungrateful to her suitor (34.11.6). The story that unfolds tells how Lydia treated Alceste quite viciously, nonetheless, the initial presentation of her crime is humorous, a sort of warning to every woman not to be *spiacevole e ingrata… al fido amante*.

Frontispiece, *Orlando furioso*, Ferrara, Giovanni Mazzocchi, 1516



Frontispiece, *Orlando furioso*, Ferrara, Francesco Rosso da Valenza, 1532

[3] The 1516 edition of the *Orlando furioso*, mentions only Astolfo's awareness and powerlessness, not Orlando's:

> Chi traea i figli, e chi le madri meste,
> Stupri infiniti e mille altri atti ingiusti
> Commessi fur, di che gran parte intese,
> Nè lo puote vietare, il Duca inglese. (OF 1516, 36.31)

In the 1521 edition, Orlando has been added as a witness: "…fur fatti stupri e mille altri atti ingiusti/ Dei quali Orlando una gran parte intese," (*OF* 1521, 36.34).

In the same canto, when Astolfo visits Earthly Paradise, saints welcome him and give him such tasty fruits that he thinks Adam and Eve were not without an excuse for being so little obedient (34.60). A cute compliment to Astolfo's holy hosts, and yet the expulsion of Adam and Eve is the original setting of original sin: to say that their sin was justifiable mocks this fundamental Christian concept right when Martin Luther and others were emphasizing its importance. In the context of the vast *Orlando furioso*, Astolfo's remarks may pass unnoticed, but they cause a careful reader to wonder what it is that Astolfo and Ariosto hold sacred.

Ruggiero, the epic's hero, is also cavalier about doctrine: he says, in effect, let's do what we can for ourselves, "and let the one who rules the heavens take care of the rest, or Fortune, if that isn't [the ruler's] job" ("abbia chi regge il ciel cura del resto,/ o la Fortuna, se non tocca a lui," 22.57.3-4). It should be noted that at this point Ruggiero is still a pagan who could be indifferent to whether human destiny is controlled by gods or by fate, yet it seems that Ariosto enjoys making readers think about who or what does control our destiny. This provocation to pondering is especially evident in the episode featuring St John in which Astolfo learns that infinite prayers and vows to God made by sinners pile up on the moon unheeded. We will return to this shortly.

An additional aspect of religious culture under scrutiny in the first half of the sixteenth century is the behavior of clerics. One does not see much invective against individual prelates in the *Orlando furioso*, except for the lecherous yet inept hermit monk in Canto 9; the depiction of despicable clerics is left to the *Satires*. Ariosto wrote seven satires in *terza rima* which were published after his death. In a manuscript which seems to be corrected in Ariosto's hand, he opens with a bitterly comical image of cardinals mutating their skins like serpents (*Sat*. 2.2-3).[4] In this same satire, which in modern editions is Satire 2, the poet takes time to delineate his own temperate ways, before painting a portrait of Frate Ciurla, who gets up to preach drunk, redder than a lobster, and who generally feasts while the populace fasts (*Sat*. 2.59-69). A sketch follows, complete with Spanish-flavored dialogue, in which Ariosto chastises prelates for not being available to callers like himself, because they are doing things that they should hide not just from his sight but from the sun itself (*Sat*. 2.70-96).[5] That's fine by him, the poet says, he can go

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[4] *Le satire autografe*, Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea di Ferrara, ms. F CI.I, B, p. 123.

[5] Similar charges are leveled at civil authorities in Ariosto's comedy, *La Cassaria*, where Crisobolo complains: "Non so io l'usanza di questi che ci reggono, che quando più soli sono e stannosi a grattar la pancia, vogliono demostarte aver più occupatione: Fanno stare un servo alla porta, e che li giuocatori, li ruffiani, li cinedi introduca, e dia alli onesti cittadini e virtuosi uomini repulsa." ("Don't I know the habits of those who govern us? The more they're alone and scratch their bellies, the more they try to show how busy they are. They place a servant at the door who lets in gamblers, pimps, and perverts and sends away honest citizens and virtuous men," *La Cassaria*, 4.2, Segre, p. 273; translation Beame and Sbrocchi, p. 28). A later verse version of the comedy omits the word *cinedi*, often translated catamites [Latin *cinaedus* from Greek, *catamitus*, a doublet of Ganymedes]; in the *Orlando furioso*, St John uses *cinedi* in a similar context in which he rails at the bothersome people who frequent courts (35.20.6).

read learned books. And anyway, he does not want to become a priest [although he had taken minor orders]: he values his freedom and does not aspire to wealth and prestige. Oh, and he may want to take a wife one day (2.115-24). Before concluding this anticlerical satire, Ariosto enumerates offenses by cardinals and popes: letting Turks invade Italy while they themselves shed Christian blood to gain Italian territories where they install their bastard children as rulers; issuing countless excommunications while giving out plenary indulgences even to "fiero Marte" ("savage Mars himself," 2.208-25): both Peter Wiggins and Cesare Segre state in their commentaries to the *Satires* that this epithet could evoke Pope Julius II.[6]

In Satire 5, which concerns marriage, Ariosto's stance is that priests do not have their own wives and thus become accustomed to pecking at other men's meat and end up voracious wolves (*Sat*. 5.18, 25). If Ariosto's *Satires* contain many a jab at priests in general, his letters show just how frustrated he became with individual clerics while trying to keep the peace in Garfagnana. Wiggins reports that Ariosto wrote to Alfonso d'Este insisting that, "it would be a holy act to burn down all the churches in the province," pp. 93-4. Ariosto did indeed make this recommendation because churches were harboring bandits (*Lettere*, February 8, 1524, p. 265). Hyperbole, to be sure, but many of Ariosto's letters provide concrete references to civil authorities who allowed priests to rape, plunder and murder with impunity. Overall, our author's warranted criticisms are tempered by his characteristic practicality: concerning one criminal cleric he concludes, "and if it were not for the fact that I fear ecclesiastical censure because I have [ecclesiastical] benefits, I would not care that he was a priest, and would punish him worse than a lay person" ("e se non fosse che io temo le censure ecclesiastiche per haver beneficio, io non guarderei che costui fosse prete, e lo castigerei peggio che un laico," *Lettere*, 17 April 1523, p. 124).

Ariosto faced a thorny religious landscape; his cynicism saturated but did not overwhelm his epic. In the *Orlando furioso*, he has Archangel Michael go off in search of Silence in a monastery where instead of virtues he finds Discord and many other vices (14.75-97). But Ariosto's more scathing indictments of the moral failings of church officials and loathing for their damnable immunity come down to us not through his epic, but through his letters and other unpublished writings. In contrast to Ariosto's careful stance in public, I will juxtapose a writer who was perhaps not afraid enough of ecclesiastical censure, Teofilo Folengo, an ordained Benedictine.

In his Macaroni Latin epic poem, *Baldus*, which was first published in January, 1517, Folengo takes aim at gluttonous and criminal priests. Antics by canny monks are depicted with relish. Folengo's portrayal of Fra Jacopino is priceless — the fellow can't manage to learn to read despite studying the alphabet over and over. He does know the letter B, however, because it resembles the handcuffs he wore when he was arrested for forcing a girl, and he pronounces it by saying "bah, bah" like a sheep (Book 8.552-9). Fra Jacopino's deficiency in literacy does not stop him from servicing the wife of the titular

[6] Ariosto wrote a sonnet on Pope Julius II which may be a send-up of the pope who was criticized by contemporaries for a multitude of failings, found below in Appendix, coupled with a Latin poem by Pietro Bembo on the same subject.

hero Baldus when she goes to confession nor does it stop him from having eight children with his young housekeeper (8.148-65; 622-28). Transgressions by the overabundant monks are itemized (8.368-77). Monks sport so many colors one can't tell which of them serve God and which Mohammed (8.486). Yet despite the excessive number of monks, churches remain in terrible shape, chalices are sold for food, and altar linens are left filthy and stained (8.609-19).

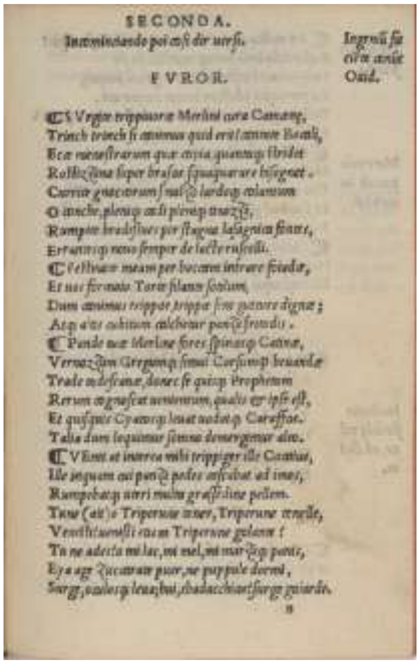
In the expanded second edition of the *Baldus* which appeared in 1521 after the advent of Martin Luther, Folengo interrupts the epic action to rail against indulgences and credulous people who believe in Mary sightings by rural girls, *Credula gens credit (malus est qui credere non vult)* (Credulous folks believe, evil is the one who does not want to believe, 1521, Bk 7, p. 92v). The poet intersperses his portrayal of greedy clergy and out of control pageantry with angst regarding his truth-telling: *Vera loqui est error? non error vera tacere?* (Is it an error to speak the truth? Is it not an error to keep silent?, 1521, Bk. 7, pp. 87v-88, 91v-93v). About 160 hexameters saturated with feigned? reticentia along with ironic glosses and pointing fingers would disappear from subsequent editions of the *Baldus*.

Portrait of Teofilo Folengo (1491-1544) by Girolamo Romanino, Uffizi Gallery.

Undaunted, Folengo soon published an epic poem in Italian called the *Orlandino* in which he incorporates Lutheran views, expressed primarily by two characters, Berta and Rainieri. When terrified during a storm at sea, Berta prays to God, not to saints; she won't confess to priests because they are lewd; she shows her faith by not believing in indulgences (*Orl.* 6.40-6). Rainieri speaks in favor of salvation by faith alone, and against the tonsure, fasting and preaching (*Orl.* 8.72.8-85). The narrator also alludes to personal attacks by clergy (*Orl.* 2.15 and 3.65). In a gem of an Apology published the following year with the second edition of the *Orlandino*, Folengo defends himself by saying that if he had not been talking about such matters he would not have used a pseudonym, and adds disingenuously, "And as a clear sign of my sincerity those few bad words I always put in the mouth of someone from the other side of the Alps, where such errors are most often wont to sprout" ("E in segno manifesto di mia sinceritade quelle pochette bestieme pongo sempre in bocca d'alcuno tramontano, donde li errori il più de le volte sogliono repullulare," p. 234); cf. *bestieme*, *Orlandino* 8.83.3, by *bestemmie* (blasphemies, bad words) Folengo signals protestant ideas.

We will return to our beloved Ariosto, but first I want to mention one more work by Folengo, the *Chaos del Triperuno*. This is an extraordinary autobiography in verse, dialogue and prose, in Italian, Latin and Macaronic Latin; the title is derived from three of Folengo's pseudonym-personalities who work together to form a better composite

self, Triperuno (Tri-per-uno, three for one). In the middle of his *Chaos*, with virulent acrostics, Folengo excoriates Ignazio Squarcialupi, Abbot of Mont Cassino and leader of the Benedictine order throughout Europe:


SECONDA.

FVROR.

Teofilo Folengo, *Chaos del Triperuno*, 1527, detail of a message in acrostics:

UNICA QUE FUERAT BENEDICTI REGULA SACRIS MORIBUS IGNATI **STERCORE FEDA PUTRET VIRTUTES** ABIERE OMNES DII VERTITE SORTEM NURSINI UT REDEAT PRISTINA NORMA PATRIS.

(The rule of Benedict which had been unparalleled in holy customs, decays with the fetid excrement of Ignatius; all virtues have gone away: O Gods, alter the fate of the Nursine [monks] so that the pristine order of our fathers may return.)

Chaos del Triperuno, pp. 95-100 (Renda, pp. 257-261). NB: Ignazio Squarcialupi had died in 1526.

Alongside aggressive invective, Folengo expresses personal trauma in the *Chaos*: young Triperuno tells of having seen choirs of monks that looked like angels and of how he had yearned to join them, only to find out that the angel-monks turned into *larvae* (evil spirits). One pseudonym-personage, Limerno, tells of having been sent to study at the home of a priest in Ferrara, a priest who held students subject, especially the pretty boys. Immediately another heteronym, Merlino, tells of a similar problem he had in Ferrara: both Limerno and Merlino recite poems about having been bothered by creatures that punctured them at night and left wounds that oozed. They then discuss how biting insects and nocturnal birds were not the real problem. Merlino insists that if one tells the truth by lying, then one is not really a liar.[7] This insistence on the truth value of poetic discourse obliges the reader to look closely at what the two pseudo-selves mean by being bothered at night as boys in the priest's home.

Teofilo Folengo does not limit his castigations to the leader of the Benedictines and to a nameless priest in Ferrara, he also excoriates the secular authority of Mantua. In Books 2-11 of the *Baldus*, the harsh tyrant Gaioffo (Scoundrel) is ridiculed repeatedly. In a twist of the well-known scene depicting Christ brought before Caiaphas, a woodcut image shows Baldus hauled before Gaioffo, where a soldier appears to marvel at the hero's prominent codpiece. At the end of Book 11, Baldus's best friend mutilates the Mantuan ruler and forces him to eat his own *membrum* 'because he committed acts

[7] *Chaos del Triperuno*, 1527, p ii-q i, pp. 119-20; and see *Proposal for an Allegorical Reading of Folengo's Baldus and Chaos del Triperuno* by Ann Mullaney, *Folengo in America*, Ravenna, Longo, 2012.

forbidden by law' (*Baldus*, 11.532-5), see images below. The Gonzagas had ruled Mantua since 1328; Francesco II Gonzaga was the Marquis of Mantua from 1484-1519, so one is forced to associate him with Gaioffo. Francesco, married to Isabella D'Este, was known to have an appetite for females, young men and prostitutes, an appetite that was not readily acknowledged in previous eras but currently is divulged: the Italian Wikipedia page provides details of his many partners, in a section incongruously titled "Gli amori." (Ariosto champions Isabella's Penelope-like chastity, 13.59-61.) Folengo's animosity may have been personal as he was friendly with Francesco's son, Federico Gonzaga. Typically a poet sought patronage from the leader of his community, he does not have him castrated fictionally.

Baldus brought before Gaioffo, 1521, p. 61v

Cingar tortures Gaioffo while Baldus and Leonardo look away, 1521, p. 120v

In contrast, despite little jabs in his epic at his patron, Ippolito D'Este, and open criticism of Ippolito's excessive demands in his *Satires*, Ariosto did show restraint when dealing with the trials of the Este family. For example, he used an eclogue to discuss the attempted coup by Giulio D'Este against Alfonso that resulted in the imprisonment for life of both Giulio and his brother Ferrante. Castiglione had stated that the courtier should always tell the truth to his prince, help him be virtuous and deter him from evil (*Cortegiano*, Bk 4.5), but he does not offer much advice on what to do if your master, say, Ippolito d'Este, already a cardinal for some time, blinds his younger brother over a woman, a crime largely unpunished by their ruling brother, Duke Alfonso, thereby ensuring that the blinded brother would find a way to retaliate. Hints concerning this family tragedy crop up here and there in the *Orlando furioso* but remain tangential. Ariosto did not publish his eclogue which addresses the failed coup (found now in *Opere minori*, Segre, pp. 224-235).

As far as personal revelations go, here too Ariosto is hard to pin down. He wrote a moving Latin lyric addressed to Pietro Bembo about jealousy: our poet passionately rejects the notion that one can be reasonable when in love: *Cur non ut patiarque fodi mea viscera ferro/ dissimulate etiam, Bembe, dolore iubes?* ("Why then don't you order that I suffer and have my insides split open with a knife, then conceal the pain too, Bembo?," 7. *Ad Petrum Bembum*, Segre, pp. 23-3). Others of his posthumously published *carmina* also proclaim fierce jealousy (21, 22, 23, Segre pp. 54-61), but one lyric undercuts this theme. In *De diversis amoribus* (*On Diverse Loves*) Ariosto specifies autobiographical details to illustrate his changeable nature. He lists the array of women he wants, which, agreed, does not negate covetousness on his part but does make one think that perhaps these Latin works were more poetic exercises than true confessions (Segre, pp. 88-93). However, it is just this tendency to present diverse facets of himself and his characters that makes Ariosto so intriguing. Both as to its parts and whole, the *Orlando furioso* is all about jealousy.

While exploring jealousy extensively, Ariosto slips in facts that cause one to ponder, like in the stupendous story of Iocondo and King Astolfo where the object which sets the whole tale in motion is a very specific necklace. Iocondo's wife, whose devotion to her husband is described in lavish detail, whose despair at his departure is heart-wrenching, gives him her prized pendant as an eternal token of her love: it is a cross set with jewels and holy relics that her father had brought home from his stint in Jerusalem before dying from the illness he also brought back (28.15). Why are we given this detail, when any keepsake would advance the plot? Iocondo accidently rides off without the cross and feels he must go back to get it. Although he headed back home after having ridden only two miles, he finds his wife in bed with a young man of the household. Is the author calling attention to the fact that a seemingly devout daughter and wife is just as likely as another to send her husband riding off to Corneto ("Cuckoldsville," Waldman, 28.24.6)?

Tangents like this in the *Orlando furioso* are too numerous and too complicated for me to pursue here so I will pull just a couple more of Ariosto's threads. In Canto 34, bearded St John enters the scene, who in Ariosto's day was thought to be the apostle and the author of both a gospel and an Apocalypse (34.86.2). St John takes Astolfo on a chariot ride up to the moon to retrieve the missing wits of Orlando. On the moon everything that has been lost on earth lies about in heaps. The imagery is dreamlike; the amassed objects are tears and sighs of lovers, nooses of flattery hidden in garlands, cicadas that have burst from singing too many poetic praises of their lords. Astolfo also finds prayers and vows made to God lying in heaps. At the same time we learn that Astolfo's enchanted trumpet and winged horse are gifts to him from God (34.74.7-8, 34.56.5-8). Thus, God attends to magical aids to restore Orlando's sanity but, like Mohammed, does not hear sinner's prayers?

Moving along on the moon, Astolfo finds a mountain of stinking flowers which he learns represent the Donation of Constantine (34.80). The Donation was a treatise which granted the Catholic church vast dominions from Asia to Africa, but which Lorenzo Valla had exposed as a forgery (c. 1440). The author appears solicitous of the reader:

"Questo era il dono (se però dir lece)…" ("This was the gift (if one can call it that)…").[8] Mentioning this phony document could imply a critique of the temporal power of the Church, except that the passage calls attention to the power of writers and scholars, one of whom had written the Donation of Constantine and had sold it as an historic document. The weird imagery of putrefying flowers may masks the message: 'Princes, befriend writers and pay them and you will live on after your death.' Stingy nobles may not have appreciated Ariosto's admonishments, but he could assume his rebukes to rulers were welcome to those readers and writers in whom his fame would endure. Literati, along with St John, relish chastising bosses who succumb to noisy flattery and like Ariosto, they find out that underlings come armed with talons:

> V'eran d'aquile artigli; e che fur, seppi,
> l'autorità ch'ai suoi danno i signori.
> I mantici ch'intorno han pieni i greppi,
> Sono i fumi dei principi e i favori
> Che danno un tempo ai ganimedi suoi,
> Che se ne van col fior degli anni poi. (34.78.3-8)
>
> (There were eagles' claws, and these were, I learned,
> the powers highborn give their intimates.
> Bellows that fill up the cliffs all around,
> are the vapors of princes and favors
> they give their Ganymedes for a time,
> that go off with the bloom of youth after.)[9]

Instead of using his own authorial voice, Ariosto has St John, the "imitator of Christ," utter fulsome praise of Ippolito d'Este and his lineage. The saint explains at length how swans on the moon (who represent poets) save worthy humans from oblivion; these sacred swans contend with birds of prey who on earth are the "rufiani, adulatori,/ buffoni, cinedi, accusatori" (pimps, flatterers,/ buffoons, catamites, accusers) and those who live at court, *OF* 35.1-31. This state of affairs embitters St John and Ariosto.

3. Coded Language

Let us now address an aspect of language usage which contributes to Ariosto's overall fame: how he handled the extensive code Jean Toscan labeled the *lexique érotique*.[10]

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[8] Cesare Segre commented: "l'Ariosto mostra di credere ancora alla donazione di Costantino a papa Silvestro… dimostrata falsa dall'umanista Lorenzo Valla" 17.78.4, note 4, p. 951, and note 8, p. 1074. Segre seems to have changed his mind about what Ariosto believed, referring later to Ariosto's "condanna per la legendaria donazione" (condemnation of the legendary Donation), *Esperienze ariostesche*, 1966, p. 94.

[9] Curiously, when Ruggiero is whisked into the air by his steed, Bradamante worries that he will incur the same fate as Ganymede because he is no less *gentil* and *bello* than Ganymede, *OF* 4.47.5-8.

[10] Jean Toscan, *Le carnaval du langage: le lexique érotique des poètes de l'équivoque de Burchiello à Marino (XVe-XVIIe siècles)*, 4 vols. Lille, Presses Univ., 1981 (1978).

In his four-volume analysis Toscan offers thousands of coded passages by about a hundred Italian authors from the Early Modern period. At its simplest level this sort of coding is synonymous with euphemism: an example that comes to mind from the *Orlando furioso* tells of the hermit who first encounters Angelica as she flees Rinaldo in a dark forest. The hermit rides a slow little donkey, looking venerable with his long white beard and, although weak from fasting and old age, he is immediately moved by "charitable" love toward poor Angelica (2.13.8). The next time we encounter the two of them the hermit lets his true nature be known: he makes advances on the unfortunate pagan beauty and when rebuffed drugs her to sleep. He then proceeds to kiss her mouth and breast, "Ma ne l'incontro il suo destrier trabocca" ("but in the encounter his steed stumbles" Waldman translates; *traboccare* can mean to brim over, overflow, 8.49.5). Neither the hermit nor our poet stop here. The image lingers:

> Tutte le vie, tutti li modi tenta,
> ma quel pigro rozzon non però salta.
> Indarno il fren gli scuote, e lo tormenta;
> e non può far che tenga la testa alta. (*OF* 8.50.1-4)
>
> (He tries all ways, all means, but not for that does that lazy nag jump. In vain he shakes its bridle and torments it, and cannot get it to hold its head high.)

The euphemistic language here defuses the drama of the potential rape. A similar encounter features poor Angelica nearly set upon by none other than Ruggiero, the hero destined to found the Este line. After using the winged hippogriff to rescue Angelica from a sea monster, Ruggiero gets the magical beast to stop and gather its wings, but he cannot stop his other "steed" whose wings are even more distended. In his frenzy to undress for the assault, he gets all caught up in his armor and right then, with readers on the edge of their seats, the canto ends as the author teases his Lord (Cardinal Ippolito d'Este) that perhaps he has grown tired of listening to the story (10.114-5).

The most extensive use of horse-play occurs in the Iocondo episode. First, when Iocondo spies the Queen and the dwarf, and later, when Fiammetta is ridden hard by il Greco, provoking several heated exchanges between the King and Iocondo concerning a night-long cavalcade (28.43.6-8; 28.64.5-8, 28.66-67). Later in the poem, the blushing Bradamante appears to use similar imagery, when she insists on jousting with Ruggiero, "I desire nothing else, and nothing else matters to me except putting to the test what he can do in the joust," ("altro non bramo, e d'altro non mi cale,/ che di provar come egli in giostra vale," 35.76.7-8). The poet hastens to tell us that she said these words simply, "words that perhaps others will have already taken maliciously" ("semplicemente disse le parole/ che forse alcuno ha già prese a malizia," 35.77.1-2).

For the most part, coded language in the *Orlando furioso* was tame, but the terminology Ariosto used in his comedies was not. Ariosto himself is thought to have recited the Prologue to his second comedy, *I Suppositi* (*The Substitutes*/ *Pretenders*), 1509, in which he elaborated on various meanings of *supposito,* placed under (*sub* + *ponere*). He talks about boys having been *suppositi* "per l'adrieto" ("in the past/ on the back" with a play on *adrieto*), and also about the new and strange experience of old people being

suppositi by young people. But then he cautions the audience against taking the meaning of the title as something wicked, like the lascivious positions depicted by the Greek writer Elephantis. In a later verse version of the Prologue Ariosto went even further and referenced *I Modi (The Positions)*, the infamous engravings of sexual positions which had become instantly scandalous in 1524. Marcantonio Raimondi had made woodcut prints based on drawings by Giulio Romano: these prints were considered reprehensible as they were reproducible by everyone, Ariosto notes (*Suppositi*, Prologue 2, v. 34).

As the play unrolls, we see that the term *suppositi* is not used to depict those submitting for purposes of "amori contro natura" as Cesare Segre words it (p. 298), but instead shows characters substituting themselves for one another, master for servant, servant for student, etc. Thus, there was no plot-driven need to elaborate on the possible sexual meanings of the title, it was entertainment. A performance of *I Suppositi* was staged in Rome in 1519 for Pope Leo X with scenes painted by Raphael; the pope was reported to have "laughed very heartily at the obscene allusions to the 'substitutions'" and invited Ariosto to come back and perform again the following year.[11] In 1520, Ariosto returned with *Il Negromante* but this new work not delight the pope, perhaps because of gibes about absolution and plenary indulgence, and praise for varying positions, before and behind (see Beame and Sbrocchi, p. xxvii; vv. 61-8).

Another comedy, *La Lena*, was performed in Ferrara in 1528 and again the following year with two new scenes added at the end. In the Prologue these added scenes are referred to as a coda, and much is made of putting the tail on behind:

> E che volete voi? La Lena è simile
> all'altre donne, che tutte vorrebbono
> sentirsi dietro la coda, e disprezzano
> (come sien terrazzane, vili e ignobili*)*
> quelle ch'averla di rietro non vogliono… (*Lena*, vv. 17-21)
>
> (Well, what do you want? Lena is like other women, who all would like to feel the tail behind, and they scorn (as though they were bourgeois, low class or disreputable) those women who don't want it in back…)

In this extended play of words, the *coda* in back is said to appeal not just to women but to young people who find *le code*, "a good practice, popular among noble persons" ("…per foggia buona e da persone nobili," *Prologue*, 28-31). The author does say that there are old people who don't mind the *coda* and who actually like modern fashions like this. The Prologue concludes by announcing *La Lena* and urging those who are rigidly old fashioned to raise themselves up and give way to those who want the *festa* (party; orgasm). In the *Orlando furioso*, *festa* is used cleverly for sexual revelry at 25.69.4 and 27.11.2; Pietro Bembo showcases *festa* spectacularly in *Gli Asolani*, 2.33.

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[11] *The Comedies of Ariosto*, Beame and Sbrocchi, p. xxvi, note 40 quotes a letter from Alfonso Paolucci to the Duke of Ferrara, 8 March 1519, pp. clxxvi-clxxxii.

The play continues along these lines with other code words for *coda*, like in scene 2, when Flavio says that his good day is in Lena's hands, she replies that hers is in his, even as the wily servant Corbolo quips, "anch'io il mio nel tuo mettere/ vorrei,"("and I too would like to put mine in yours," v. 198). The banter continues: "O che guadagno, dimmi, Flavio:/ hai tu quella faccenda?" ("Oh, what a deal! Tell me, Flavio, do you have that stuff?") where *faccenda* refers to money, Corbolo answers in place of his master, that he would not have come without it, his *faccenda* is at hand and in good shape; not impressed, Lena says simply that she is not talking about that (vv. 199-204). Agnolo Firenzuola (1493-1543) made the term "faccenda" explicit in his *Canzone in Lode della Salsiccia* (*In Praise of the Sausage*): "Mangiasi la Salsiccia innanzi e drieto… E se cercando vai/ Se dall'Uomo alla Donna è differenza,/ Nel modo dell'usar questa faccenda…" ("The sausage is eaten in front and in back… And if you go wondering if between man and woman there is a difference in the way of using this thing…").[12]

More shocking is Lena's complaint to her husband, Pacifico, after he tells her not that she shouldn't be a whore, but that she should do her job with more modesty. She answers angrily that he was the one who had pimped her out and even told her to receive men not just at her front door but at her back door too ("l'uscio dinanzi" and "quel di dietro," *Lena*, 1655-7). As a playwright, Ariosto did not seem to tire of this particular trope: in the Prologue to *Il Negromante*, we see "il variare, e qualche volta metterlo/ di dietro, giovar suol; ne la comedia/ dico" ("to vary, and sometimes to put it in back, is usually helpful, in comedy, I mean," v. 63-8). You may think that Ariosto went far enough in this direction, and I would agree with you, but there are more layers to this coded language which need to be discussed. The instances of innuendo we have surveyed were openly acknowledged within the plays; I would like to bring out a few coded meanings that lie hidden in plain sight.

Ariosto and other writers of his era were masters of rhetorical misdirection. Bette Talvacchia, in her book *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, draws on the writings of Giorgio Vasari to explain a perception of art as either honest or dishonest. She posits the "sanctioning value of metaphor" — vegetation representing fecundity in the frisky fresco (below), for example — and states:

> The skill of the artist, whose manipulation of form allows the viewer to see two things at once, is another stratum of sanctioning cover: virtuosity becomes one of the meanings of the image, an overlay of form that provides justification for the sexual content (*Taking Positions*, p. 105).

Talvacchia offers a nuanced analysis of how and why some Renaissance art works are considered legitimate or honest, others transgressive or dishonest. After contemplating images (below) from the walls of Renaissance palaces, *onesti* or *disonesti* as they may be, we may leave them to professional art historians and look at a simple optical illusion.

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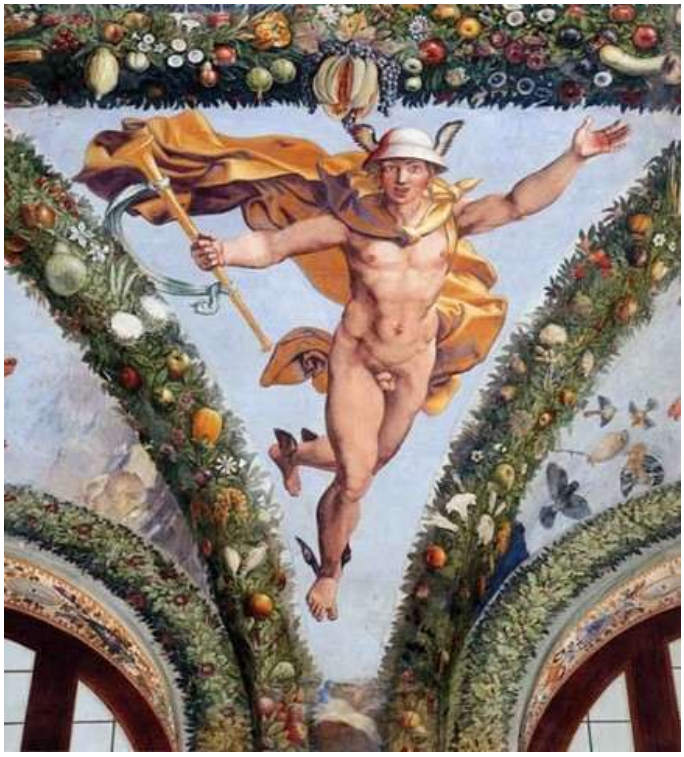
[12] Firenzuola replies that certain women want the "*faccenda*" in back only a little, "Se non se certe mone schifa il poco,/ Che ne vogliono dietro poco poco," *Canzone in Lode della Salsiccia*, *Opere di Messer Agnolo Firenzuola Fiorentino,* Classici Italiani, Milano, 1802, vol. 4, p. 196.



Details of frescoes from the Loggia di Psiche, Villa Farnesina, Rome: Mercury by Raphael (1483-1520) and Giulio Romano (1499-1546); festoon of fruits and vegetables by Giovanni da Udine (1487-1564).

Below: work by Giulio Romano for Federico Gonzaga, *Honesto Ocio* (For Honest Leisure), Camera di Psiche, Palazzo Te, Mantua, see Talvacchia, pp. 101-10.

The "Love Poem of the Dolphins" (below) by Swiss artist Sandro Del Prete is an image made to intentionally mislead the viewer. We saw s similar tactic in the *Chaos del Triperuno* when Folengo's pseudoselves shared memories of painful nocturnal attacks by insects and such, then immediately admitted that their attackers were not actually bugs. Merlino and Limerno tell the truth by means of an obvious lie, or misdirection. While enjoying the sporting dolphins, let's try to get a feel for another aspect of Ariosto's works: his lexical *sprezzatura*. I will call on Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), a friend or at least life-long acquaintance of Ariosto's, to flesh out this last section of my presentation. Bembo's writings cover a broad range of topics and genres, here we will look at a few examples of his virtuosity in handling the erotic code, which should shed light on Ariosto's skill in this realm.

Sandro del Prete: https://im-possible.info/english/art/delprete/index.html
and see also Magic Eye autostereograms: www.magiceye.com

In 1505, Pietro Bembo, eldest son of a well-known Venetian diplomat, boldly published *Gli Asolani* with the renowned Aldus Manutius press. The three-book narrative about love included poems and dialogues, and featured a dedicatory letter to Lucrezia Borgia. The book's stated purpose is helping young people experience facets of love through literature before they must experience love in real life (*Asolani* 1.i). Even though his readers are presumed to have little love experience, Bembo continually addresses his audience as young people in the know. For these enlightened readers, he imbues terms like death, faith, hope and thought with innuendo.

In Book 1 Perottino, one of the main interlocutors, details how he suffers from love;

> È cosa natural fuggir da morte;
> E quanto può ciascun tenersi in vita.
> Ahi crudo Amor, ma io cercando morte
> Vo sempre, e pur così mi serbo in vita.
> Che perché 'l mio dolor passa ogni morte,
> Corro a por giù questa gravosa vita.
> Poi, quand'io son già ben presso a la morte,
> E sento dal mio cor partir la vita,
> Tanto diletto prendo della morte,
> Ch'a forza quel gioir mi torna in vita.[13]

[13] Pietro Bembo, *Gli Asolani*, critical edition by Giorgio Dilemmi (Florence, Academia della Crusca, 1991), pre-1505 version of the poem: Q 1.14, p. 33; the name Perottino is explained in a passage of the 1530 edition, p. LXXXIV.

> (It is a natural thing to flee from death, and for one to hold himself alive as long as he can. Ah, cruel Love!, still I am always seeking death, and yet this is how I keep myself alive. Because since my pain surpasses every death, I rush to set down this weighty life. Then, when I am already quite near death, and I feel life going out from my heart, I take such delight in death, that willy-nilly such making merry returns me to life.)

Subsequent versions of the poem became less obvious as the accompanying prose became more explicit. Perottino goes on and on about his "due manifestissime morti" ("two extremely conspicuous deaths," *Asolani* 1525, 1.16, p. 18v). The bragging spills over into another poem which ends with the immodest question, "Chi vide mai tal sorte:/ tenersi in vita un uom con doppia morte" ("Whoever saw such a thing, a man keeping himself alive with two deaths," *Asolani* 1553, 1.16).

Pietro Bembo in the habit of a Knight of Malta
by Lucas Cranach the Younger


Portrait of Cardinal Pietro Bembo
by Titian, c. 1545

Ariosto too was fond of this trope: his madrigals *Amor, io non potrei* and *O se, quanto è l'ardore* feature coital death (Segre, pp. 154-5). In *Lasso, che bramo ancor* (*Ah, I still desire*) the boast of two deaths may explain the poet's predicament: why he is full of desire when he already has what he desired (vv. 16-22, Segre p. 213). Capitolo 12, the poet reiterates how *speme* keeps him alive (12.46-51, 73-5, Segre p. 193). *Capitolo* 16, *O vero o falso che la fama suone* is surprising, in that along with humorous complaints of staying alive against his will, the poet describes having to step on war casualties (Segre, pp. 203-5). Scholars familiar with the code are needed to elucidate Ariosto's poems.

One of the words that Bembo and Ariosto used for phallus *is fede* (faith). In *Gli Asolani*, after high-spirited Gismondo is sternly cautioned to not say anything that could cause him dishonor, he launches into a description of intimacy between himself and his lady:

> Era il tempo di mezza estate… quando nelle camere della mia donna, già fattami per lunga pruova della mia calda fede meno selvaggia, che ella da prima non m'era, in vaga e sola parte ella et io sedevamo ragionando…
>
> (1505, h iii; Dilemmi, 2.24.49, p. 159)

> (It was the time of mid-summer… when in my lady's rooms, having already made her by long proof of my warm faith less savage toward me than she had been with me earlier, she and I sat together conversing in a charming secluded spot.)

The phrase *mia calda fede* disappears from all subsequent editions of *Gli Asolani*. Ariosto used *fede* to good effect as the tagline of a sonnet:

Madonna, sète bella e bella tanto, ch'io non veggio di voi cosa più bella; miri la fronte o l'una e l'altra stella che mi scorgon la via col lume santo; miri la bocca, a cui sola do vanto che dolce ha il riso e dolce ha la favella, e l'aureo crine, ond'Amor fece quella rete che mi fu tesa d'ogni canto; o di terso alabastro il collo e il seno o braccia o mano, e quanto finalmente di voi si mira, e quanto se ne crede, tutto è mirabil certo; nondimeno non starò ch'io non dica arditamente che più mirabil molto è la mia fede.	My lady, you're a beauty and such a beauty, I don't see anything more beautiful than you; look at that brow, or at one eye or the other which show me the way with their blessed light; look at that mouth, to which alone I give credit for having a gentle laugh and gentle speech; and the golden locks, where Love made that net which was laid for me from all sides; or that neck of polished alabaster and the breast or the arm or the hand, and in the end whatever one admires of you, and whatever one believes is there, sure it's all admirable, nonetheless, I won't hold back from saying ardently that what is a lot more admirable is my "faith." (Sonnet 25, Segre pp. 142-3)

Yes, *fede* could mean simply faith, that's the point. Keen readers take into consideration the playful tone, the fact that he lists physical features of his lady, not moral virtues. They look at Ariosto's other works, like his madrigal *Se voi così mirasse alla mia fede* (*If you were to gaze upon my faith…*) where *fede* again seems quite physical (Segre p. 156). And they visit his comedy *La Lena* (quoted above in reference to word play with *faccenda*) where Flavio wants to give Lena his faith instead of the money he owes her, "FLAVIO: Ti do la fede mia. LENA. Saria mal cambio tòr per danari la fede, che spendere non si può" ("Flavio. I give you my faith. Lena. It would be a bad trade to take faith for money, which can't be spent," vv. 217-222). Then they grasp that Ariosto's narrator is tendering his own *mirabil… fede* with humor and skill.

As stated above, Ariosto is considerably more subtle with his word play in the *Orlando furioso* than in his comedies and posthumously published works. An example of his delicacy: after he waxes eloquent about his own wits being lost on his lady's ivory bosom, on her alabaster hillocks from where he will gather them back in with his lips, our poet begins the next octave "Per gli ampli tetti… (35.3.1) where *tetti* (rooftops) means dwellings, but coupled here with *ampli*, makes one think of ample *tette* (breasts). Sometimes Ariosto places loaded words in close proximity to one another not to produce

a coded phrase but rather to give an impression of naughtiness, like in the passage cited above in which St John emits sexually charged words to blast courtiers: *mantici*, *fumi*, *tempo*, *ganimedi*, *anni*, *poi* (34.78.3-8).[14] Or like the bellows that represent King Astolfo and Iocondo in action as they take a girl and have pleasure with her *in caritade e in pace* (in charity and in peace) which sound like sexual positions (28.54.1-4). Because the erotic lexicon was so widely used, one may presume a sensual meaning where it might not be intended, like when Orlando is rescuing naked Olympia from a predatory sea monster, and the poet states, "Brama Orlando ch'in porto il suo legno entre" ("Orlando wishes that his 'ship' would enter 'port,'" 11.59.3). So, why mention a bit of playful innuendo in the epic? In the hope that my audience would appreciate Ariosto's skillful handling of the limits of tolerance implicitly assigned to the genres he selected, and in the hope that scholars will do more work on the erotic code.

A selection of Italian writers who used the erotic lexicon:

Anonymous
Ariosto, Ludovico (1474–1533)
Bembo, Pietro (1470 –1547)
Berni, Francesco (1497–1535)
Bronzino, Agnolo di Cosimo (1503–1573)
Burchiello (1404–1449)
Cammelli, Antonio, called il Pistoia (1436–1502)
Caro, Annibale (1507–1566)
Coppetta, Francesco (1509–1553)
Della Casa, Giovanni (1503–1556)
Dolce, Lodovico (1508–1568)
Domenichi, Lodovico (1515–1564)
Firenzuola, Agnolo (1493–1543)
Folengo, Giovanni Battista (1490–1559)
Folengo, Teofilo (1491–1544)
Gelli, Giambattista (1498–1563)
Giambullari, M. Pier Francesco (1495–1555)
Grazzini, d'Antonfrancesco, il Lasca (1503–1584)
Martelli, Lodovico (1500–c. 1527))
Machiavelli, Niccolò (1469–1527)
Mauro, Giovanni (1490–1536)
Medici, Lorenzo dei (1449–1492)
Molza, Francesco Maria (1489–1544)
Pazzi, Alfonso de' (1509-1555)
Poliziano, Angelo Ambrogini (1454–1494)
Pulci, Luigi (1432–1484)
Ruscelli, Girolamo (1504–1566)
Rustico Filippi (c. 1235–c. 1295)[15]
Sasso, Panfilo (1455–1527)
Serafino dei Cimelli/ Serafino Aquilano (1466–1500)
Simeoni, Gabriello (1509–c. 1572)
Tansillo, Luigi (1510–1568)
Tebaldeo, Antonio (1463–1537)
Varchi, Benedetto (1503–1565)

I think the erotic lexicon played an important role in literature during the first half of the sixteenth century throughout Europe. Some 1500 years earlier Latin writers were using an impressive array of words from many fields to convey sexual meanings: J.N. Adams in *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* identified over 800 such words. Italian writers, adapted and adopted these terms and added hundreds and hundreds more: Jean Toscan in *Le carnaval du langage*, identified over 2,300 loaded words. In most spheres of

[14] *mantici*~phallus, at 28.54.1-4, sexual activity by King Astolfo and Iocondo compared to *mantici*; *fumi*~emissions, cf. Sat. 2.163-5 cited above and GB Folengo, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, pp. 51v-52; *tempo*~phallus; *ganimedi*~catamites/ Ganymedes, St John had earlier used *cinedi*, 35.20.6; *fior*, *anni* and *poi*~anus. 34.78.7-8.
[15] Rustico Filippi, *Sonetti satirici e giocosi*, ed. by Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati, Roma, Carocci, 2005; this edition includes careful work on the poet's coded vocabulary.

human endeavor progress is made as the centuries pass, but in this field we have lost ground and we need to regain the ability to read the bountiful texts we have.

Going back to Bembo's work, a reader conversant with the code feels the exuberance he transmits when he describes sexual performance, like in the sonnet *Viva mia neve:*

> ...
> Se gite disdegnosa, tremo e loco
> non trovo, che m'asconda, e non ho scampo
> del gelo interno; se benigno lampo
> degli occhi vostri ha seco pace e gioco,
> **surge la speme, e per le vene un caldo**
> **Mi corre al cor**, e sì forte l'infiamma,
> Come s'ei fosse pur di solfo e d'esca.
> Né per questi contrari una sol dramma
> Scema del **penser** mio tenace e saldo,
> C'ha ben poi tanto, onde s'avanzi e cresca. (*Rime*, 28.9-14, Segre, p. 530.)

(If you go off scornful, I shake and find no spot where I might hide, and I have no escape from the rime inside; if a benign spark from your eyes holds peace and fun within, '**hope' surges and a warmth rushes through my veins to my 'heart'**, and inflames it, as though it were made of sulfur and kindling. Not for this hardship does one dram dwindle **from my solid and tenacious 'thought'**, which has so much then, with which to progress and grow.

[The terms bolded are widely used in the erotic lexicon: *speme* (hope/ ~sperm), cor (heart/ phallus), penser (thought/ phallus)].

Critics over the centuries have alternately praised and blamed Bembo for having imitated Petrarch, now scholars in the know need to explain in what ways Bembo promoted Petrarch's vocabulary and style and in what ways he used Petrarch's phrases to camouflage messages about sexual activity.

The erotic lexicon must be acknowledged in order for us to appreciate many of the Italian authors of the era. I think that Italian authors were admired throughout Europe for many traits, their mastery of innuendo was one of these. Teofilo Folengo's brother, Giovanni Battista Folengo (1490-1559) published volumes in Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and France filled with sophisticated linguistic play and satire packaged as biblical commentary in Latin. GB Folengo drew on the literary code which had gained adherents back in Roman times and had evolved into a complex game: he created a Latin style which must be seen to be believed. I have posted *Samples* of his brilliant coded texts on academia.edu and folengos.com. While Ariosto's works acquire additional color (and esteem) from an understanding of the erotic code, many works written and published by the Folengo brothers and by Pietro Bembo demand an understanding of the erotic code.

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

Clockwise, from top left:
Praying Hands, drawing 1508,
Adam and Eve, engraving, 1504
Adam and Eve, drawing, 1510,
The Bath House, engraving, 1496
Self-portrait, drawing, c. 1500-5
Self-portrait, oil on panel, 1500
Self-portrait, oil on panel, c. 1503

5. Conclusion:

In primary school we learned the name Albrecht Dürer and were shown his Praying Hands. In high school a nun showed us his *Adam and Eve* right before their expulsion from Eden (the 1504 engraving not the 1510 drawing). It was not until I was in graduate school that I viewed his intriguing Bath House, and only much later did I see his nude self-portrait. This is as it should be. I am not advocating exposing more of Ariosto than a reader is ready to appreciate. I do not want dilettantes to see Ariosto's lexicon as erotic when it is not, but I do not want his clever wordplay neglected and I really do not want scholars who carefully analyze wordplay to meet with opprobrium. If we are to arrive at well-rounded views of our respected artists, we need to look at them from many angles. As a 30 year old PhD candidate I was unable to get hold of Lorenzo de' Medici's complete poetry because the volumes available to me in the United States omitted some of his carnival songs; today, his *Canzona de' visi addrieto* (Song of the Faces Turned Around) pops up on Wikisource.[16] Neither state of availability seems right: adult researchers need access to texts but the public should be warned.

Ariosto paved his way to posterity with his talent and his self-control in print. He handled the popular erotic code with agility. When he let erotic innuendos flare, he solicited compliance from his audience. When an entire episode went beyond conventional boundaries, like the Iocondo novella, Ariosto told readers they could skip over it. By adhering to a sort of common sense for the ages, Ariosto succeeded in surpassing contemporaries who showed less restraint and whose works suffered later oblivion and misinterpretation.

Once authors have been accepted as canonical there seems to be a tendency to discount their more intemperate stances, thus one frequently finds statements about Ariosto and his work which emphasize his canonization. Giovanni Aquilecchia, an Ariosto scholar writing for the Encyclopedia Britannica, proclaimed that the *Orlando furioso* "is generally regarded as the finest expression of the literary tendencies and spiritual attitudes of the Italian Renaissance" whose main unifying element is "the personality of Ariosto himself, who confers his own refined spirituality on all his characters." Paul Larivaille wrote an article on Ariosto's "discreet eroticism" and, although he examined some of our poet's coded allusions, he did not highlight the more explicit meanings.[17]

Authors who are considered marginal often draw to their work scholars and critics who are attracted to this marginalism and draw attention to it. These less well known writers are perhaps not so far away in talent from their better known counterparts. At any rate it may be worthwhile to consider whether gifted writers who entertained with insistent verbal antics and who paraded a more militant form of agnosticism could have become famous five hundred years ago and could have remained famous.

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[16] Lorenzo de' Medici, *Opere*, vol. 2, ed. Attilio Simioni, Bari, Laterza, 1914. https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Opere_(Lorenzo_de%27_Medici)/XVI._Canti_carnascialeschi/Canzona_X

[17] Paul Larivaille, "De l'équivoque érotique dans la poésie italienne de la Renaissance, et de l'éroticisme discret de l'Arioste en particulier," *Italique* II, Librairie Droz, 1999.

Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, Venice, Fratelli da Sabbio, 1532,
woodcut after a drawing by Titian

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Other helpful resources: Academia della Crusca - Dizionario, Wikipedia, Wiktionary, Google Play Books and Internet Archive

I have incorporated some of the changes made by colleagues who helped prepare a version of my paper for publication, MLN, vol. 133, no. 1, 2018, p. 100-111. Someone caught lude where I meant lewd; I may or may not have incorporated others' edits here but I thank those who contributed and who remain blameless for the current version.

Appendix, from the handout given at the talk

Two poems regarding Giuliano della Rovere (1443-1513) who became Pope Julius II in 1503; compare the criticisms of the pope that fill the satiric dialogue by Erasmus, *Iulius exclusus e coelis* (*Julius Excluded From Heaven*), 1514. Writers of the day played with the meaning of *rovere*, oak.

ARIOSTO, On Pope Julius II, Sonnet 36:

L'arbor ch'al viver prisco porse aita,
poi si converse a miglior tempo in oro,
or s'ha produtto un sì soave alloro
che la fragranza in fino al ciel n'è gita.
O fra' mortali e fra li dèi gradita
felice pianta! O vivo e bel tesoro!
Per te s'alunga il seme di coloro
che per cosa divina il mondo adita.
Quinci i rami gentil, quinci i rampolli
ch'empion di gloria e di trionfo il mondo,
e fan Roma superba e li suoi colli.
Godi, sacra colonna, e scorgi a tondo:
alta sei d'ogni parte e senza crolli,
né del tuo stato mai fu il più giocondo.

(The tree which lent aid to primal living, then in a better age turned itself to gold, now has produced such a sweet laurel, that the fragrance has gone up to the heavens. Oh happy plant,* welcomed by mortals and by gods! O living and comely treasure! Through you the seed extends of those who point to the world as a divine thing. Here the genteel branches, here the scions which fill the world with glory and triumph, and make Rome superb and her hills. Enjoy, sacred column, and look all around: you are towering all around and without collapses, nor was there was anyone ever happier with your state.)

*There seems to be a lot of word play here, *Felice pianta* (line 6): Felice della Rovere, was a daughter born in 1483 to the then Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere. Some terms may imply sexual activity (*alloro*, *in fino*, *seme*, *colonna*, *a tondo*). Note that Cesare Segre annotates this sonnet: “Written in November of 1503 for the election of Giuliano della Rovere to Pope as Julius II (p. 149),” this could be speculation as the poem may have been written at a later date, in jest.

Pietro Bembo: IULII SECUNDI PONTIFICATUS MAXIMUS

ILLA piis populis mundoque accepta recenti;
Sub Iove cum nondum ferreus orbis erat;
Nec proscissa graves vertebant arva iuvenci;
Vinea nec lachrymas falce resecta dabat;
Mella sed aeriae sudabant roscida Sylvae;
Et lac pro gelida flumen habebat aqua;

Nunc ò nunc redit ad primos bona quercus honores;
Quos habuit, mundi cum tener orbis erat;
Quercus, glande sua quae quondam Heroas alebat,
Cura DEUM quercus sancta, piumque nemus;
Dignaque Cecropiae pinguis cui sylva Minervae
Cedat, et Herculeis populus apta comis:
Cedat et ipsa suo laurus Phoebeia luco,
Inflexaeque pedem Bacchica serta hederae;
Vel myrti Veneris, vel Sylvani cyparissi,
Vel quae capripedi pinus amata DEO est.
Namque boni mores nostro rediere sub aevo;
Ut primum posito constitit illa situ;
Simplicitasque inculta comam, rectique cupido,
Et lex, et probitas, et sine labe fides.
Nec redit ad primos tantum bona quercus honores;
Quos habuit mundi cum tener orbis erat:
Sed provecta solo nitidis caput inserit astris,
Quantum homines aluit, tantum alitura DEOS.
Carmina, 1553, pp. 46-7.

(The Supreme Pontificate of Julius II

THAT -- welcome to the pious populace and to the recent world under Jove when the orb was not yet made of iron, and heavy young bulls were not turning over fields having been cut into, nor was the vine, cut back by the sickle, giving sap, but the lofty woods were sweating dewy honeys, and the river held milk instead of gelid waters; now, O now – [that] good oak goes back to the first honors, which it had when the orb of the world was tender; to the oak which at one time nourished Heroes with its acorn (glande), to that oak, holy care of the GODS, and let the pious wood and the fertile woodlands worthy of Cecropian Minerva yield, and the poplar suited to Herculean locks, and let the very laurel of Phoebus/ Apollo yield in its own grove, and [let] the Bacchic wreath of stiff ivy [yield] its foot, or even the myrtles of Venus or the cypresses of Silvanus, or the Pinus/ pine which was beloved by the goat-footed GOD. For good customs came back during our lifetime, as soon as that [oak] having been placed in position stood firm -- and simplicity, of unkempt hair and upright passion and law and probity and faith without stain. And not only does the good oak go back to the first honors, which it had when the orb of the world was tender, but having been conveyed upward from the soil, [the good oak] inserts its head into the shining stars: as many men as it nourished, so many GODS is it about to nourish.)

Note: cf. another Latin poem by Bembo, in which relative pronouns precede the antecedent in a similar way as in the above poem, titled *Priapus*.