Questioning Poetry in Ariosto's *Negromante*

In my essay I will analyze Ariosto's comedy *Il negromante,* focusing on its protagonist, the pseudo magician Iachelino, as well as certain aspects of the *Orlando Furioso* involving magic. The nexus between magic and poetry has a privileged role in Ariosto's *opus*, not exclusively in the *Furioso* but also in his minor works. I will argue that in his characterization of Iachelino as a poet figure, defined by his rhetorical and/or magical powers, Ariosto seems to conceive of poetic control and authority as the result of a synthesis between magic and rhetoric. Thus, he ostensibly harmonizes the two pre-eminent currents of thought of the Renaissance—Humanism and Neoplatonism—which had embraced respectively rhetoric and magic as the disciplines through which man could assert his central position in, and control of, the world. We soon learn, however, that Iachelino is a trickster, with no magical powers, but nevertheless endowed with rhetorical powers that allow him to convince people and manipulate their worlds. When compared with Iachelino, Atlante, the principal magus of the *Furioso*, seems to represents his opposite. Equally characterized by Ariosto as a poet figure, Atlante has real magical powers but in turn he lacks Iachelino's great rhetorical control. In my essay, however, I will argue that the differences between these two characters are blurred by an essential similarity in their pursuits: while seeking control over their worlds respectively through magic or rhetoric, both their actions share the distinctive trait of fraud and deception. The initial optimistic vision of poetic control evoked by these characters, therefore, soon turns out to be quite problematic. Through these figures, Ariosto actually challenges the two predominant philosophical traditions of his time, while simultaneously questioning the value of his own poetic pursuit.

1. Atlante

The magician Atlante has often been interpreted as a poet figure, ever since Attilio Momigliano's insightful remark that "il castello del mago racchiude insieme il segreto e il fascino dell'*Orlando*, è la più bella immagine di quel perpetuo e vano vagabondar di donne e cavalieri" (13).[1]

Whereas Atlante's magical creations are overwhelmingly present throughout the poem, he himself appears only twice, if we exclude his presence as a voice from the tomb in Canto 36. He is initially described in the second canto of the *Furioso*. Here, we first see him through the eyes of other characters of the poem, in this instance

Brunello's, and his presence is characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity.[2] Brunello tells Bradamante that, while he was leading a troop to Marsilio's camp, "un che frenava un gran destriero alato" 'a knight in armour on a horse with wings' (2.37.8)[3] suddenly appeared and kidnapped the woman who was accompanying him. The undetermined nature of Atlante, expressed by the article *un*, is farther underscored by Brunello, who wanders whether he is a human or diabolic being:

> Tosto che 'l ladro, o sia mortale , o sia
> una de l'infernali anime orrende,
> vede la bella e cara donna mia;
> come falcon che per ferir discende,
> cala e poggia in uno atimo, e tra via
> getta le mani, e lei smarrita prende.
> Ancor non m'ero accorto de l'assalto,
> che de la donna io senti' il grido in alto. (2.38)[4]

As it appears to Brunello, Atlante's actions are characterized by violence. He is a *ladro* (thief): he takes what does not belong to him but, rather than a thief, he is a robber. He is like a falcon, and in the next two octaves he is compared to a *rapace nibio* (a rapacious kite) (39.1) and defined as *rapace* himself.[5] As the narration proceeds, Brunello's uncertainties about Atlante's identity begin to dissipate: in his search for his beloved, he comes upon a castle, "forte e ben posto, a meraviglia bello" 'strong and bold . . . splendid to behold' (41.8) and he now knows it to be the work of demons: "E seppi poi, come i demoni industri, / da suffumigi tratti e sacri carmi, / tutto d'acciaio avean cinto il bel loco, / temprato all'onda et allo stigio foco" (42.5-8).[6] In front of this castle, Brunello witnesses Ruggiero's and Gradasso's battle against the necromancer; again, it is a battle that appears to be violent rather than fraudulent. Atlante, armed with a lance, repeatedly strikes the two knights who seem unable to defend themselves, and even less to counterattack:

> Or su Gradasso, or su Ruggier percote
> ne la fronte, nel petto e ne la schiena,
> e le botte di quei lascia ognor vòte,
> perchè è sì presto, che si vede a pena.
> Girando va con spazïose rote,
> e quando all'uno accenna, all'altro mena:
> all'uno e all'altro sì gli occhi abbarbaglia,

che non ponno veder donde gli assaglia. (2.53)[7]

Atlante's straightforward strength and violence, however, are called into question when Brunello observes the last moment of the battle, when a "maraviglia" that "al falso più che al ver si rassimiglia" 'as false as if my tale were inexact. / Here fiction is less marvelous than fact' (54.7-8) occurs: Atlante uncovers his shield, which emits such a powerful light that whoever looks at it loses his consciousness and helplessly falls into the necromancer's hands. This is Gradasso's and Ruggiero's fate who, like many others before them, are taken prisoners into the unassailable castle.

When we finally meet Atlante in Canto 4, our suspicion that his doings are governed more by fraud than by violence is confirmed. Bradamante, armed with Melissa's advice and with the magic ring she has stolen from Brunello, is ready to confront Atlante in order to deliver her beloved Ruggiero. At the sound of her horn, Atlante appears on his winged horse which "per l'aria il porta / contra costei, che sembra uomo feroce" 'toward the warrior Maid, / Whom he believes to be a man, he's borne' (4.16.3-4). Atlante, whose violence is here revealed as pure appearance, is not wearing any arms:

Da la sinistra sol lo scudo avea,
tutto coperto di seta vermiglia;
ne la man destra un libro, onde facea
nascer, leggendo, l'alta maraviglia:
che la lancia talor correr parea,
e fatto avea a più d'un batter le ciglia;
talor parea ferir con mazza o stocco,
e lontano era, e non avea alcun tocco.

Non è finto il destrier, ma naturale,
ch'una giumenta generò d'un grifo:
simile al padre avea la piuma e l'ale,
li piedi anterïori, il capo e il grifo;
in tutte l'altre membra parea quale
era la madre, e chiamasi ippogrifo;
che nei monti Rifei vengon, ma rari,
molto di là dagli agghiacciati mari.

Quivi per forza lo tirò d'incanto;
e poi che l'ebbe, ad altro non attese,

e con studio e fatica operò tanto,
ch'a sella e briglia il cavalcò in un mese:
così che in terra e in aria e in ogni canto
lo facea volteggiar senza contese.
Non finzïon d'incanto, come il resto,
ma vero e natural si vedea questo.

Del mago ogni altra cosa era figmento;
che comparir facea pel rosso il giallo:
ma con la donna non fu di momento;
che per l'annel non può vedere in fallo. (4.17-19; 4.20.1-4)[8]

Atlante's presumed strength and violence in battle are here clearly disclosed as a result of a particular kind of magic, namely literary imagination. The magic book that Atlante holds in his right hand is, in fact, an image of literature, not only in so far as it is a book, hence a repository of poetic words, but also because the words that Atlante finds in it make the imaginary battle appear as real. The description of Atlante, to one side and motionless ("non avea alcun tocco"), reading out of a book, suggests a narrator who, by reading his poem aloud in front of an audience, activates the public imagination to the point that the words become reality in front of their eyes. The reiteration of the verb *parere* in these *ottave* emphasizes the power of literature to achieve the illusion of reality. By the same token, Ariosto describes all of Atlante's tools as *figmenti*, a word which, derived from the Latin verb *fingere*, carries a connotation both of falsehood and of creation, thus conflating reality and illusion.

Just like his magic book, Atlante's hippogryph and shield are also figures of poetry. Critics generally agree that Ariosto's hippogryph is modeled upon Pegasus, the classical winged horse that, with a blow of his hoof, gave origin to the spring of poetry, and by extension is incarnate poetry itself.[9] Atlante has attracted and made tractable his winged horse "con studio e fatica" 'by patience and persistence'; this expression recalls "lo studio dei molti anni" 'years and years of labor and learning' of *Satira* 6.66, which Ariosto believes are necessary to master poetry.[10] Atlante, however, has taken only one month to master the hippogryph, a fact that cannot fail to appear ironic in view of the subsequent events, when Atlante loses all his magical instruments and is thus defeated. Before this happens, however, Atlante can fly "in terra e in aria e in ogni canto," this last word being an obvious reference to the poetry of Ariosto's forty-six cantos of the *Furioso*.

The sources of Atlante's shield are rooted in the story of Perseus and Medusa. According to the myth, Perseus succeeded in killing the monster, who transformed whoever set eyes on her into a stone, by looking at her image as it was perfectly reflected in a shield that the goddess Minerva had donated to him. With the Gorgon's head, which, although truncated, maintains its petrifying powers, Perseus defeated various adversaries and, at the conclusions of his adventures, he restored the shield to Minerva. On the shield he places Medusa's head as special thanks for the goddess' assistance.[11] Albert Ascoli has interestingly remarked that Coluccio Salutati, in his reading of the Medusa myth developed in the *De laboribus Herculis* 3.42, "allegorizes the shield, as well as Medusa herself, as poetic eloquence, the power of rhetoric both to illuminate and control" (Ascoli 166-67). Thus Atlante's book, his winged horse, and his shield are forceful symbols of poetry, and their possessor is defined by them as a *figura poetae*, whose poetic power is at the same time magical and rhetorical.

Armed with his magical/poetic instruments, Atlante is ready to conclude the battle against Bradamante: he uncovers the shield and, as he expected, Bradamante falls on the ground, ready to be taken prisoner by the magician. Confident of his absolute control over the events, Atlante lands his hippogryph and approaches the fallen knight:

> Lascia all'arcion lo scudo, che già posto
> avea ne la coperta, e a piè discende
> verso la donna che, come reposto
> lupo alla macchia il caprïolo, attende.
> Senza più indugio ella si leva tosto
> che l'ha vicino, e ben stretto lo prende.
> Avea lasciato quel misero in terra
> Il libro che facea tutta la guerra. (4.25)[12]

Atlante's loss of the battle against Bradamante is clearly a loss of authority over his poetic world: when he approaches the lady-knight he leaves behind his horse, his shield and, above all, the book that was in control of the narration. Bradamante, in turn, is the final winner in so much as she is endowed with the hermeneutical power given to her by Melissa. She is the "reader" who, armed with the knowledge of Atlante's fiction, can ultimately deconstruct it. Defeated and bereaved of his magical tools, Atlante relies upon his last resource: his persuasive power. He tells Bradamante that his predatory actions were not caused by an ill will, but by the desire to save Ruggiero's life, which, as the stars have

predicted to him, will end by an act of treason. For this reason he has built the castle, where Ruggiero is now imprisoned, together with all the other knights and ladies Atlante has kidnapped in order to keep Ruggiero in good company. Atlante tries to appeal to Bradamante's good heart, so that she will not attempt to liberate Ruggiero, and thus help the magician in his effort to save Ruggiero's life, but all his words are to no avail:

> Rispose la donzella: – Lui vo porre
> in libertà: tu, se sai, gracchiae ciancia;
> né mi offerir di dar lo scudo in dono,
> o quel destrier, che miei, non più tuoi sono:
>
> né s'anco stesse a te di torre e darli,
> mi parrebbe che 'l cambio convenisse.
> Tu di' che Ruggiero tieni per vietarli
> il male influsso di sue stelle fisse.
> O che non puoi saperlo, o non schivarli,
> sappiendo, ciò che 'l cielo di lui prescrisse:
> ma se l' mal tuo, c' hai sì vicin, non vedi,
> peggio l'altrui c'ha da venir prevedi. (4.34.5, 4.35)[13]

Mary Farrel has observed that Atlante's failure is caused by the weakness of his love for Ruggiero. In her words, "to be most effective, to manipulate illusion without being caught in it, the magician, like the poet, must be free of passion" (52). I suggest, however, that Atlante's real failure is due to the unwholesomeness of his poetic power. During the Renaissance two theories of poetry coexisted side by side. On the one hand, following a classification already existing in the Middle Ages, poetry was conceived under the aegis of rhetoric[14]; on the other, poetry was regarded, particularly by authors such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Salutati, as infused with divine inspiration, as a repository of divine and prophetic truths.[15] The poetry of Atlante the magician, however, in his encounter with Bradamante, fails on both fronts. His magical and prophetic powers, although real, are vain: as Bradamante shrewdly remarks, he was not able to foresee his own destiny and, when separated from his magical instruments, he becomes an old man, unable to escape his final lot. Moreover, and most importantly, his truthful speech has no persuasive power. As it often happens in the Furioso, "in speaking the plain truth one will be taken for a fraud anyway," and this is exactly Atlante's fate (Ascoli 150). His words, in Bradamante's eyes, are mere

"ciance," a word that, as we will see, characterizes the power of Iachelino, Atlante's *alter ego*.

2. Iachelino

My analysis will now depart from the labyrinthine "selva" of the *Orlando Furioso* to enter the frenzied atmosphere of the city which permeates the *commedia erudita* of the Renaissance. Far removed from the medieval allegorical world, the city, center of the Renaissance universe, becomes the true protagonist of this comedy. In Ariosto's play *Il negromante*, the city is Cremona, and these are its dwellers.[16]

Secretly married to Lavinia, Cintio has been forced by his adoptive father, Massimo, to marry Emilia. Although nearly three months have passed, "non ha ancor Cintio / fatto alcun saggio di quest'altra femmina" 'so far Cintio hasn't tasted this other woman' (1.2.285-86) and he is consequently presumed impotent. The suspicion that some other woman might have cursed Cintio with the evil-eye induces Massimo to hire the necromancer Iachelino. Cintio, for his part, does not want the necromancer to uncover his feigned impotence through his magical powers, and thus jeopardize his marriage to Lavinia. He hopes, in fact, that because of his impotence his marriage to Emilia will eventually be annulled, and thus he will be free to be with his secret wife. Made aware of Iachelino's lust for money by Fazio, father of Lavinia, Cintio decides therefore to confide in the necromancer and to pay him double Massimo's retainer in order to enlist his loyalty. Another young man named Camillo Pocosale, having heard in the meanwhile about Cintio's impotence, begins cherishing the hope of finally being able to have Emilia, whom he has vainly loved for a long time. He also pays the necromancer to use his powers not to cure Cintio, but rather to render his impotence permanent.

We encounter a chaotic world, where nobody has what he wants and no one wants what he has. This state of disarray is also emphasized by the very structure of the plot: as Maria Luisa Doglio has pointed out, the *topos* of the classical happy ending is inverted, "with the marriage transferred to the beginning, thus pre-emptying the love story, solved and expected from the start, and reducing all the actions to a mere confusion, till the inevitable unraveling of all the knots" (430). Moreover, the speaker of the Prologue warns us:

> avvertite e ricordatevi
> che gli è da carnoval, che si travestono

> le persone; e le foggie, ch'oggi portano
> questi, fur ier di quegli altri, e darannole
> domane ad altri; et essi alcun altro abito,
> ch'oggi ha alcun altro, doman vestirannosi. (17-22)[17]

At an explicit textual level, this allusion to Carnival functions to justify the fact that Cremona, in the 1528 performance of *Il negromante*, was represented by the same scenery used to depict Ferrara in the production of *La Lena*, which took place in the same year. But Carnival becomes also the metaphor for an upside-down world where all the normal rules are suspended and reversed. This Carnival state of confusion within the city will come to an end with the coming of an external force, which alone will be able to restore the lost order. Iachelino is this external influence; through him the sins of the community will be publicly denounced, thus carrying out what constitutes the central part of the rite of Carnival: catharsis will be achieved and, as a result, order in society will be reinstated.[18]

Who is this character in whose hands lies the destiny of so many people? Iachelino gives no details of his own identity, but from the title of the comedy we learn that he is a *negromante*. In the list of the characters, however, as well as in the stage directions, he is designated as *astrologo*. It should also be pointed out that in the first scene of the play the *balia* (nurse) refers to him as *medico* just as in the version of 1520 the term *fisico* appears in place of *astrologo*. The same uncertainty about the professional identity of Iachelino is expressed by Fazio in the second scene of the first act. There he informs his old friend Lippo of the vicissitudes of his daughter Lavinia and expresses his concern for the fact that Massimo "è ito a ritrovar, non so se astrologo / o negromante debbo dir" 'has gone and found some astrologer or necromancer—I don't know which' (1.2.299-300).

The confusion surrounding Iachelino's title is significant. On the one hand it reflects the contemporary Neoplatonic discussions of magic, in which philosophers were trying to establish the fundamental value of natural magic and astrology, by opposing them to their evil sister, demonic and necromantic magic.[19] On the other hand, however, this ambiguity points to an objective difficulty in defining the specific role or function Iachelino will come to play within the microcosm (both city and text) that we are analyzing.

In the third scene of the first act Cintio, his servant Temolo and Fazio, express their divergent opinions about Iachelino. Fazio believes him to be very learned "in l'arti che si chiamano / liberali" 'in that which

is called the Liberal Arts' (1.3.343-44). Cintio, in turn, affirms that "ne l'arte magica / credo che intenda ciò che si può intendere, / e non ne sia per tutto il mondo un simile" 'in the Magical Arts he knows all that can be known, and I would think that there isn't his equal in the whole world' (1.3.345-47). Temolo's opinion is clearly negative: "Lo giudico / Una volpaccia vecchia (1.3.337-338) . . . quando con parole semplici, / senza aver dimostrato pur un minimo / Effetto, può cavar di mano a Massimo / quando denari e quando roba" 'I say that I take him for a sly old fox . . . when with simple words, and without producing the smallest results, he's able to extract sometimes money, sometimes merchandize, from your avaricious old man' (1.3.395-98). The different powers that Iachelino is supposed to possess are then catalogued by the credulous Cintio, only to find in Temolo a very skeptical and sarcastic audience:

Cint. Mi dice ch' a sua posta fa risplendere
la notte e il dì oscurarsi.
Tem. Anch'io so simile-
mente cotesto far.
Cint. Come?
Tem. Se accendere
di notte anderò un lume, e di dì a chiudere
le finestre.
Cint. Deh, pecorone! dicoti
che estingue il sol per tutto il mondo, e splendida
fa la notte per tutto.
Tem. Gli dovrebbono
dar gli speciali dunque un buon salario.
Cint. Perchè?
Tem. Perchè calare il prezzo e crescere,
quando gli paia, può alla cera e all'olio.
. . . .
Cint. Te ne fai beffe, e ti par d'udir favole?
Or che dirai di questo: che invisibile
va a suo piacer?
Tem. Invisibile? Avetelo
voi mai, padron, veduto andarvi?
Cint. Oh, bestia!
Come si può veder, se va invisibile? (1.3.351-70)[20]

To Cintio's final claim that Iachelino is able, at his will, to transform men and women into different species of animals, Temolo answers that this is not so great a miracle and that it happens every day in their community:

> Non vedete voi, che subito
> Un divien podestate, commissario,
> Proveditore, gabelliere, giudice,
> Notaio, pagator de li stipendii,
> Che li costumi umani lascia, e prendeli
> O di lupo, o di volpe o di alcun nibio? (1.3.378-83)[21]

The transcendental and abstract world of magic is literalized by Cintio, to be restored once again to metaphor, albeit at a very concrete and material level, by his servant. Through this reversal a wonderfully comic effect is reached, and culminates in Temolo's open satire of the entire establishment:

> Di questi spiriti, a dirvi il ver, pochissimo
> Per me ne crederei; ma li grandi uomini,
> E principi e prelati, che vi credono,
> Fanno col loro esempio ch'io, vilissimo
> Fante, vi credo ancora. (1.3.413-17)[22]

Most important, this exchange between Cintio and Temolo, which purports to comment on Iachelino and his magical powers, is actually an incisive statement about language and its referential relation to reality. For Cintio, who believes in the truth and effectiveness of magic, language has a simple and unproblematic referential quality; on the contrary Temolo, a much subtler reader, understands the metaphorical property of language and its power to signify something "other" than what it explicitly seems to convey. For Temolo, language is a weak and uncertain epistemological tool, and through his voice Ariosto foreshadows a clear connection between magic and language, where both are conceived and condemned as powerful tools of deception.

The gullibility of the citizens pointed out by Temolo in the scene previously examined, and his suspicions about Iachelino's powers, are corroborated in the first scene of the second act by Nibbio, the necromancer's servant:

> Per certo, questa è pur gran confidenzia,
> Che mastro Iachelino ha in se medesimo,

Che mal sapendo leggere e mal scrivere,
Faccia professione di filosofo,
D'alchimista, di medico, di astrologo,
Di mago, e di scongiurator di spiriti;
E sa di queste cose e de l'altre scienze,
Che sa l'asino e 'l bue di sonar gli organi;
Benché si faccia nominar lo astrologo
Per eccellenzia, sì come Virgilio
Il poeta, e Aristotele il filosofo;
Ma con viso più che marmo immobile,
Ciance, menzogne, e non con altra industria,
Aggira et aviluppa il capo agli uomini;
E gode e fa godere a me (aiutandoci
La sciocchezza, che al mondo é in abondanzia)
L'altrui ricchezze. (2.1.526-42)[23]

The satire of magic developed in this comedy through the voices of Temolo and Nibbio is familiar to Ariosto's readers. This world in which Iachelino is able to operate is populated by the very same people whose wits are on the moon of the *Orlando Furioso*, having been lost "dietro alle magiche sciocchezze" 'magical nonsense' (34.85.4). Despite the ironic treatment, however, we should not interpret as purely satirical Temolo's statement that he is ready to believe in magic because "li grandi uomini e principi e prelati" do so. Magic played a fundamental role in the Italian Renaissance, not only among simple and uneducated people, but also within the highly sophisticated world of the Estensi court.[24] To dismiss a Renaissance discourse on magic as merely ironic or superficial, or to consider it with a detached attitude of neutrality, often results in a loss of understanding of the deeper role of magic in the text.

Again we should ask ourselves this question: Who is Iachelino, and what is his real power? By now we know he is an impostor with no real supernatural power. He is a charlatan who takes advantage of people's simple-mindedness and credulity in order to dispossess them of their money and personal effects. In order to define better the significance of Iachelino, we should return to the Prologue and its opening lines:

Più non vi parrà udir cosa impossibile,
se sentirete che le fiere e gli arbori,
di contrada in contrada, Orfeo seguivano;
e che Anfione in Grecia, e in Frigia Apolline

cantando, in tanta foia i sassi poseno,
che addosso l'uno all'altro si montavano
(come qui molti volentier farebbono,
se fusse lor concesso), e se ne cinseno
di mura Tebe e la città di Priamo;
poi che qui troverete Cremona essere
oggi venuta intera col suo populo. (1-11)[25]

Here, Ariosto thematizes the central role of the city, and particularly the parts that Orpheus, Amphion, and Apollo had in the founding of the first cities. They are seen in their position as archetypal poets in the classical tradition, who were able, through their music and magical powers, to organize culture within the social nucleus of the city. This is a subject dear to Ariosto, as it recurs in his *Satira* VI, a text in which he asks for Pietro Bembo's help in finding a suitable tutor who would instruct Virginio, Ariosto's son, in the humanistic subjects, particularly in the language and poetry of the Greeks. The ideal Humanists Ariosto envisions in *Satira* VI are again represented by the original builders and organizers of cities, those poets who, like Apollo, Amphion, and Orpheus, brought order to society by virtue of their power of eloquence and by their good work:

Che col buon stile e più con l'opre buone,
persuasero agli uomini a doversi
ridurre insieme, e abbandonar le giande
che per le selve li traean dispersi;
e fér che i più robusti, la cui grande
forza era usata alli minori tòrre
or mogli, or gregge et or miglior vivande,
si lasciaro alle leggi sottoporre,
e cominciar, versando aratri e glebe,
del sudor lor più giusti frutti accòrre.
Indi i scrittor féro all'indotta plebe
creder ch'al suon de le soavi cetre
l'un Troia e l'altro edificasse Tebe;
e avesson fatto scendere le petre
dagli alti monti, et Orfeo tratto al canto
tigri e leon da le spelonche tetre. (72-87)[26]

In both *Il negromante* and *Satira* VI, Ariosto certainly had in mind a passage in Horace's *Ars poetica*:

> Silvestris homines sacer interpresque deorum
> caedibus et victu foedo deterruit Orpheus,
> dictus ob hoc lenire tigris rabidosque leones.
> dictus et Amphion, Thebanae conditor urbis,
> saxa movere sono testudinis et prece blanda
> ducere quo vellet. fuit haec sapientia quondam,
> publica privatis secernere, sacra profanis,
> concubitu prohibere vago, dare iura maritis,
> oppida moliri, leges incidere ligno.
> sic honor et nomen divinis vatibus atque
> carminibus venit. (391-401)[27]

For Horace, as Ernesto Grassi points out, "poetry affects the passions and reveals a relationship to the kind of rhetoric that leads to action and the realization of political ends. It is that primary force that is able to overcome the chaos in which men originally live."[28] In the early Renaissance period, the Humanists, who denied the supremacy of scholastic logic and raised rhetoric to the status of philosophy, had explored the same concept of rhetorical, organizational and constructive power. Poliziano's *Oratio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvis* is only one of the many instances in which rhetoric is considered the discipline indispensable to the functioning of state. According to Poliziano, rhetoric is that quality through which man excels over other animals:

> Haec igitur una res et dispersos primum hominem in una moenia congregavit, et dissidentes inter se conciliavit, et legibus moribusque omnique denique humano cultu civilique coniunxit. Quapropter etiam deinceps in omnibus bene constitutis beneque moratis civitatibus una omnium semper eloquentia effloruit summumque est fastigium consecuta. (Poliziano 883-85)[29]

By adopting Horace's text almost *verbatim*, and thus implicitly evoking one of the favorite themes of secular humanism, Ariosto would seem to emphasize a fundamental quality of the poet, namely his rhetorical power, which enables him to bring order within society, thus exercising a civic function. At the same time, through the divinely inspired poets such as Orpheus, Amphion, and Apollo, whose voices and music possessed magical powers, Ariosto also points to the mystical, theological and prophetic aspect of poetry which had first been embraced by Dante and subsequently endorsed by the Humanists.[30] Through these

archetypal poets, Ariosto envisions an exemplary poet figure who, with his privileged and insightful knowledge, is able to exert a strong and concrete influence on society. This ideal of a kind of poetry that embraces both civic commitment and divine knowledge is, however, soon undermined within the very text of the *Satira*. Ariosto's initial celebration of poetry and humanistic values, in fact, soon turns into a bitter attack on the corruption of his contemporary fellow poets. Not only do they languish in vice, particularly in sexual immorality and sodomy, but they adopt affected attitudes, such as changing their Christian names to Greek- and Latin-sounding names, as if this device would make them become better poets, more than would the hard work of many years.

If the civil and edifying qualities of poetry are here clearly subverted by the anti-social attitudes of the poets contemporary to Ariosto, the hope placed in the metaphysical and magical properties of poetry are shattered as well. Ascoli remarks that in the lines "Indi i scrittor féro all'indotta plebe / creder ch'al suon de le soavi cetre / l'un Troia e l'altro edificasse Tebe," Ariosto points to the mystifying character of poetry rather than accepting "the conventional picture of salutary allegorical duplicity" (118).

I would argue that a critique of poetry, considered both in its more strictly humanistic and Neoplatonic terms, is also at the core of the comedy *Il negromante*. As I have already pointed out, the very first lines of the *prologo* thematize, as the similar lines in *Satira* VI do, the ideal kind of poetry that unifies social commitment and divine insight. The presence of the city of Cremona should not be viewed as a wonderful occurrence, the voice in the prologue tells us, since it is, as it was in the classical times, the prerogative of the poetic voice to build the cities and to bring order to primordial chaos. The reasons for this presence are mysterious, "Parmi che vorreste intendere / la causa che l'ha qui condotta: dicovi / chiar ch'io nol so, come chi poco studia / spiar le cose che non mi appartengono" 'I supposed that you would like to know what brought her here. I can truthfully say that I don't know, for I make little effort to pry into matters that don't concern me' (27-30), just as mysterious and magical are the properties of poetry. Ariosto's celebration of the miraculous power of the poets is recalled, albeit to be once again subverted, a few lines later, when the narrator resumes the question of the presence of Cremona:

> Questi vi potranno rendere
> conto di quanto cercate d'intendere
> de la venuta di Cremona: io dirvene

altro non so, se non ch'ella, per esservi
più grata, ci ha arrecata una comedia
nuova, la quale il Negromante nomina.
Ora non vi parrà già più miracolo
che sia venuta qui, che già giudicio
fate che 'l negromante de la fabula
l'abbia fatta portar per l'aria a i diavoli;
che quando anche così fosse, miracolo,
saria però. (44-55)[31]

Cremona has magically appeared, it has materialized through the poetic world of the comedy. The verse "ora non vi parrà già più miracolo" 'now it will no longer seen such a miracle to you' echoes the very first line of the prologue—"più non vi parrà udir cosa impossibile" 'don't think it strange if you hear'—thus directly associating the necromancer with the primordial poets. At once, however, the audience is abruptly warned of the unreality of Iachelino's magic, thus anticipating the comedy's development, but also, at the same time, insinuating a doubt about the actual power of poetry.

The necromancer, in the world of Ariosto's comedy, thus becomes a *figura poetae*, though clearly a negative one. Just as the poets Ariosto criticizes in *Satira* VI, who change their Christian names, like Pietro and Giovanni, into Pierio, Iano or Iovian, in order to intensify their poetic aura, in the same way Iachelino changes his name—at times he is Giovanni, at others he is Piero—in order to avoid recognition and consequently punishments for his mischief[32]:

Andiamo come zingari
di paese in paese; e le vestigie
sue tuttavia, dovunque passa, restano,
come de la lumaca, o per più simile
comparazion, di grandine o di fulmine;
sì che di terra in terra, per nascondersi,
si muta nome, abito, lingua e patria.
Or é Giovanni, or Piero; quando fingesi
greco, quando d'Egitto, quando d'Africa;
et é, per dire il ver, giudeo d'origine,
di quei che fur cacciati di Castilia.
Sarebbe lungo a contar quanti nobili,
quanti plebei, quante donne, quanti uomini
ha giuntati e rubati, quante povere

case ha disfatte, quante d'adulterii
contaminate, or mostrando che gravide
volesse far le maritate sterili,
or le suspizïoni e le discordie
spegner che tra mariti e mogli nascono. (2.1.542-60)[33]

The list of his wrongdoings is endless; the targets of his greed belong to all different social classes. He constantly creates new plots to cheat them out of their money. Unlike Orpheus, Amphion, and Apollo, who with their poetic words brought order to society, Iachelino seems to bring chaos and destruction wherever he goes. While the archetypal poets, as envisioned by Horace, prohibited transient and free coupling, Iachelino encourages it; while they made rules for wedded life, he systematically incites husbands and wives to break them; while harmony became the rule in those original cities, discord reigns in every family reached by the necromancer's influence.

In the second scene of the second act we finally meet Iachelino and from him we discover his plan of action in Cremona. In this scene he informs Nibbio that he has already received some money from Massimo to buy the medicines he will supposedly use to cure Cintio's impotence, and in the meantime he is waiting for Massimo to deliver two silver basins to him, which he has claimed are necessary for the curing ceremony. He is at the same time plotting to extract from Cintio some money but, most important for his gain, he is designing to rob a large quantity of silver that Camillo Pocosale had inherited from an uncle. Camillo, in fact, has recently been captured in Iachelino's net. He is in love with Emilia and, after learning about Cintio's impotence, has contacted the necromancer and has offered him fifty florins in order to convince him not to cure Cintio and thus make the end of that marriage possible. Nibbio appears worried about Iachelino's grand scheme, and would like just to grab as much as possible now, and flee before they are discovered. He suggests that they could very easily earn Camillo's florins simply by declaring the truth to Massimo, that is to say that Cintio is only feigning his impotence. Iachelino brusquely interrupts Nibbio and lectures him on his own philosophy concerning the "mugnere le borse" 'to milk a purse':

Sono alcuni animali, de i quali utile
altro non puoi avere che di mangiarteli,
come il porco; altri sono che, serbandoli,
ti danno ogni dì frutto; e quando all'ultimo

non ne dan più, tu te li ceni o desini,
come la vacca, il bue, come la pecora;
sono alcuni altri, che vivi ti rendono
spessi guadagni, e morti nulla vagliono,
come il cavallo, come il cane e l'asino.
Similmente ne gli uomini si truovano
gran differenzie. (2.2.646-56)[34]

Cintio, Massimo, and Camillo belong to the category of the very rich men and, Iachelino continues, for the time being he will try to get some money out of them: "con promesse e frottole / in lungo meno e menarò, fin che aridi/non li truovi del latte: un dì poi, toltomi / l'agio ch'esser mi paian grassi e morbidi, / io trarrò lor la pelle, e mangeròmeli" '…whom I am stringing along with promises and stories and will continue to do so until the milk runs dry. Then one day, when I no longer find them soft and fat, I'll skin them and eat them' (2.2.676-80).

Words referring to animals, used both in their proper and metaphorical sense, appear in *Il negromante* with an astonishing frequency, especially, but not exclusively, in the speeches of Temolo and Iachelino, the only two characters who assume a position of control throughout the text. Through these metaphors, Ariosto conveys a vision of a degraded universe, where men are still caught in the brutish qualities that characterized them in their chaotic primordial state.[35] By considering all human beings he comes to interact with as having animal-like rather than human qualities, Iachelino puts himself above them and, by contrast, fashions himself as a God-like figure, endowed with the power of total control over them. Moreover, he comes to be recognized as a God by those very same people who put themselves at his mercy. When Camillo visits the necromancer for the first time, in the third scene of the second act, he addresses Iachelino in the same way he would speak to a God in his temple:

Io vengo a ritrovare il potentissimo
di tutti i maghi, ad inchinarmi all'idolo
mio, cui miei voti, offerte e sacrificii
destino tutti: che voi la mia prospera

fortuna sète. Ah! ch'io non posso esprimere,
maestro, quant'ho verso voi buon animo. (2.3.703-08)[36]

The same sacred and votive language is echoed in the words of Cintio who, albeit with more restraint than the foolish Camillo, *prega* and *supplica* (asks him and begs him) (v. 894) Iachelino to grant him his favors. Through this God/animal opposition developed in his characterization of Iachelino and the inhabitants of Cremona, Ariosto is clearly parodying Pico's vision of a world in which man can freely fashion himself as God or brute. Ariosto's irony is particularly sharp, once again at Camillo's expense, on the volitive aspect of this transformative power of man, probably the most distinctive feature of Pico's thought. Iachelino, who wants to keep Camillo occupied through the night in order to have the opportunity to steal his silver, has convinced him that Emilia is head over heels in love with him and, unable to wait another day to consummate their love, has demanded that he should go to her house that night. Camillo is naturally concerned about how he will be able to enter her house unnoticed. Iachelino has already decided to put him in a trunk and make everybody believe that this trunk contains a ghost who will finally disclose the reasons for Cintio's impotence. Before revealing this plan to Camillo, however, he brags about his powers to transform him into whatever kind of animal he wishes: a cat, or a dog, or a tiny little mouse. At this, Camillo shows his admiration and his own eagerness to be transmuted in an even lesser animal than Iachelino has suggested:

Astr. Son cento modi facili
da mandarvi sicur. Vi farò prendere
forma, s'io voglio, d'un cane dimestico
o di gatto. Or che direste, vedendovi
trasformare in un topo, che è sì piccolo?
Camil. Forse anco in pulce o in ragno
cangiarestemi? (3.3.1063-68)[37]

As Iachelino himself, like all the different characters of this comedy, possesses the same bestial qualities, he ultimately falls short of God-like status, and shares the same destiny as the people he intends to put down. As Nibbio declares, he can hardly read or write, and he knows about the arts he claims to be practicing as much as "l'asino e 'l bue di sonar gli organi" 'a donkey or an ox knows about playing an organ' (2.1.533). He is, as Temolo had predicted from the start, and Fazio has discovered too late, "una volpaccia vecchia" 'a sly old fox' (1.3.341), "una volpaccia d'inganni e d'astuzia / piena" 'a sly old fox full of cunning and deceit' (4.1.1357-58). The metaphor of the fox is a *topos* of rhetorical

simulation, traditionally often opposed to the image of the lion, symbol of physical strength.[38] When Temolo and Fazio describe Iachelino as an old fox, they grasp exactly the essence of this character, whose power lies precisely in his rhetorical skills. When we see Iachelino in action, in his dealings with Camillo, Cintio and Massimo, we are struck by his capacity for conceiving an illusory world and convincing others of its reality. Iachelino is only pretending to have magical powers, and yet he creates a world that is a high-powered rhetorical and poetic illusion. The connection between Iachelino's rhetorical powers and literature comes to life particularly in the third scene of the second act, where the necromancer is trying to convince Camillo that Emilia is burning with love for him. To this purpose, he has written a letter that he now hands over to Camillo, claiming that Emilia had written it for him:

Camil. Di quelle man, più che di latte candide
più che di nieve, è uscita questa lettera?
. . .
Astr. Prima da lo alabastro, o sia ligustico
marmo, del petto viene, ove fra picciole
et odorate due pome giacevasi.
Camil. Dal bel seno de la mia dolce Emilia
dunque vien questa carta felicissima?
Astr. Sua bella man quindi la trasse, e dièmela.
. . . .
Camil. O bene aventurosa carta, o lettera
beata, quanto è la tua sorte prospera!
. . . .
O fortunato lino, e più in questo ultimo
degno d'onor, che tu sei carta fragile,
che mai non fussi tela, se ben tonica
fusti stata di qual si voglia principe;
poi che degnata s'è la mia bellissima
padrona i suoi segreti in te descrivere. (2.3.762-87)[39]

One of the most striking aspects of *Il negromante* is that Emilia and Lavinia, Camillo's and Cintio's respective objects of desire and the principal causes of the comedy's incidents, are remarkably absent throughout the whole comedy and exist only as projections of their lovers' minds. In this scene, however, for the first time in the text, we have the tangible, albeit simulated, presence of Emilia, who appears on stage in the form of writing. The letter, in fact, by virtue of having been

in contact with her bosom, has clearly become a physical extension of Emilia, so much so that Camillo, at the apex of happiness, addresses the letter with the stereotypical Petrarchan language he would use to invoke the woman he loves.

We cannot fail to recognize the parallels between this scene and one of the central episodes of the *Furioso*, where Orlando, as Eugenio Donato has remarked, "encounters Angelica transformed into literature."[40] In Canto XXIII of the *Furioso*, Orlando is led by his horse to a meadow bordering on a clear river; here the knight finds many trees whose barks are carved with the names of Angelica and Medoro. The narrator's voice intervenes to remind the reader that this is one of the places "gia descritti" where the two lovers would come to be together. All of Orlando's attempts of self-deception fail, and, acknowledging the truth, he arrives at the house of the shepherd who had sheltered Angelica and Medoro in a state of despair. The shepherd, trying to console him, begins to recount the story of the two lovers, and this narration will finally trigger Orlando's madness. In his reading of this episode, Donato comments:

> "Già descritti"—Orlando has in fact involuntarily entered into literature, and more specifically into the very narrative of the *Orlando Furioso*, from a character being transferred into a reader . . . . If Orlando stumbled on the "già descritto," what he reads and hears is already in the "già detto": not only because the story had already been told, but also because the story itself does nothing but refer to literary commonplaces ... This dissolution of the narrative into the general discourse of literature can only have as a consequence the transformation of Orlando from the subject of the narrative to a stereotyped, traditional, lamenting lover worthy of the most extreme Neapolitan Petrarchist. (52-53)

Both Orlando and Camillo encounter their objects of desire in the form of literature; both, from protagonists, become readers and, finally, both embody the conventional petrarchan lover.[41]

There is, however, a fundamental difference between these two episodes: while Orlando's entry into literature is marked by an encounter with truth, and hence madness, Camillo encounters literature as fraud, which ultimately will bring him happiness through the fulfillment of his desire. Fraud is not thematized in this scene exclusively: in fact, it can be argued that fraud is the main motif of this comedy. If on the one hand the centrality of fraud is part of the basic strategy which qualifies comedy

as such, on the other fraud, as we will see, has a privileged role in Ariosto's poetic world. Cintio's impotence, from the start, is feigned and thus fraudulent. By the same token, Iachelino's powers are fraudulent as well. Iachelino is consulted because of his *presumed* magical *powers* to cure Cintio's *presumed impotence*. A clear connection is here drawn between fraud and power (the latter being either magical, sexual or poetic); and through this connection the ambiguity surrounding the *locus* of power is mapped out. If Cintio's and Iachelino's frauds are the principal motors of the events, they are by no means the only exemplifications of fraud within this text. Fazio supports Cintio's concealed marriage to Lavinia and his pretense of impotence; Massimo, we discover at the end of the comedy, has been concealing the marriage he had contracted while in exile in Calabria, as well as the existence of a daughter who turns out to be Lavinia. The entire plot of the comedy is constructed and developed around different kinds of frauds, the most intricate and revealing for our purposes being the necromancer's.

One of the most innovative aspects of *Il negromante* is the absence of any specific reference to classical sources. Ariosto, like other playwrights of the Renaissance who were trying to create a new genre within Italian literature, had shown anxiety toward his Latin predecessors: in the prologues of his previous comedies, and particularly in the prologue of *I suppositi*, Ariosto justified his debt towards the Latin poets by situating his practice of imitation within a long tradition which stemmed from the Greeks playwrights and had flourished into the new vernacular comedy. Ariosto, however, claims that his dependence on the classical authors is so subtle that it should not be considered as theft.[42] It appears obvious that, through this very disclaimer, Ariosto is implying the possibility that poetic imitation is exactly what he maintains it not to be: theft, and thus a fraudulent act.[43] Maria Luisa Doglio has interpreted the absence of any reference to poetic imitation in *Il negromante* as a sign of Ariosto's proud awareness of his originality: the "new" vernacular comedy was born, and it does not require any further explanations or theorizations (Maria Luisa Doglio, 429-30). If, on the one hand, Doglio's remarks are certainly justified, on the other it should be pointed out that in this comedy Ariosto, by thematizing fraud as the main force that "keeps the plot going," is not so much declaring his independence from the classical authors, but rather broadening the field of poetic fraud by including not only the fraudulent activity of imitation, but all kinds of poetic activity as well. As so often happens in the *Furioso,* however, the fraudulent quality of poetry is given positive value

in *Il negromante* as well, and the negative character of Iachelino acquires unsuspected positive traits.[44]

Iachelino is assigned to restore the lost order within the city of Cremona, a city populated by men who, seen as similar to animals, fail to attain those god-like qualities that Giovanni Pico had longed for in his *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. We are facing a world that is still in primordial chaos. Like Orpheus, who with his music was able to lure animals to follow him, Iachelino seduces the people of Cremona through his rhetorical power. Trying to satisfy his own hunger for money and possessions, he also strives to fulfill everybody else's desires: Massimo's, who wants his son cured of his impotence; Cintio's, who only wishes to be reunited with his lawful wife; and finally Camillo's, who is willing to do anything to possess Emilia. The art of the necromancer is his word. Through his word he convinces people of the possibility of obtaining what they want and thus he creates a world that coincides with his complex design. At the end of the comedy, once his intrigues have been discovered, he will have to flee Cremona hastily in order to avoid the vengeance of the people he had tried to exploit. What he leaves behind, however, is a community that has reached order and happiness.

After Camillo finds out that Cintio is already married to Lavinia, Massimo learns that Lavinia is his real daughter and is now more than willing to accept her marriage to Cintio. Camillo will now be able to fulfill his dream and marry Emilia. The happy ending is reached with the help of the "infallibile / divina providenza" 'unfailing divine providence' (5.3.1883-84), but nevertheless, without the necromancer's doings the protagonists would have remained in their chaotic impasse.[45] Iachelino has succeeded in manipulating, if not controlling, and transforming the lives of Cintio and Camillo. As Eugenio Garin has argued, Renaissance magic is an art whose aim is to modify and transform. In his words, "il punto di vista da cui parte l'astrologo è la necessità di convincere, di persuadere le forze della natura che ci minacciano, alleandosi con alcune di esse per combattere le altre, giucando tutte le nostre risorse per battere i nostri avversari."[46] Iachelino has operated in the world as a real magician would have. Yet he does not possess those magical powers he claims to have and the illusion he creates is a deception. He simply is, in Temolo's words, a "volpaccia vecchia."

The city portrayed in this comedy, as we have already observed, is far from the idyllic ordered state depicted by Horace, and chaos has ruled in it long before the appearance of Iachelino.[47] Eugenio Donato has astutely remarked that in Ariosto's poetic world it is not the woods and

their intricate paths that represent the threatening space that needs to be avoided. In the woods, the knights can pursue their "unending enterprise," and thus differentiate themselves from the king and the common people who do not venture into the woods but live in the city. The city itself is not a threatening place: the knights can leave the city whenever they please. The real threatening space in the world of the *Furioso* is, according to Donato, the enchanted castle. In his words:

> Once they [the knights] enter an enchanted castle, there is little they can do to leave it, not because enchantment bars their physical exit, but because enchanters know that the best way to keep the knights prisoner is to offer them the illusion that they are possessing an object they desire, or else to offer them the constant illusion that they are finally about to possess that which they have long craved for. (43)

One of the enchanted castles Donato has in mind is, of course, Atlante's castle of illusions, his last magical creation, as well as one of the most memorable ones in the poem, constructed in the vain attempt of saving Ruggiero from his final destiny. Every wandering knight who happens to arrive at this castle suddenly has a vision of his object of desire, be it a horse or a woman, and the play of appearance and disappearance of these objects keeps the knights from leaving this castle (*Orlando Furioso* 12.3-22).

The enchanter's *modus operandi* in the *Furioso*, as delineated by Donato, perfectly tallies with Iachelino's actions. He himself controls the lives of the characters of the comedy by acting upon their desires. The city of the comedy thus becomes a threatening place, fundamentally not different from an enchanted castle; everybody in Cremona is under Iachelino's spell and the city itself has acquired the labyrinthine quality of Atlante's castle of illusions. Interestingly, most of the characters of *Il negromante* have arrived in Cremona almost by chance, after having inhabited other places or wandered in other lands. Fazio is originally from Florence, Cintio is adopted and presumably comes from another place; Lavinia is also adopted and, born in Calabria, she was brought to Cremona by her mother who was looking for her husband Anastagio/Massimo; Massimo himself was exiled and returned in Cremona after long travels. Moreover, as Jack D'Amico has remarked, Cremona's labyrinthine character is more obviously revealed in the case of Nibbio. When Temolo sends him all over the place, claiming that Iachelino has been killed, in order to distract him and redirect the trunk

containing Camillo into Lavinia's room, Nibbio loses himself in the intricacies of the streets.[48]

If the city of Cremona has the same features of the enchanted castles of the *Furioso*, there is an obvious difference between them, which is partly to be ascribed to the characteristics proper to the two different genres of comedy and epic: the inhabitants of Cremona are convinced that they can obtain their objects of desire by Iachelino's impressive rhetorical power, while the prisoners of the enchanted castles are controlled by the magical powers of the enchanters.

As my analysis should have clarified, however, there is not a substantial difference, in Ariosto's poetic world, between magic and rhetoric. Both Atlante's magical powers and Iachelino's rhetorical skills are fraudulent in nature: their aim is to create the illusion of a synthesis between words and reality, which unrelentingly tend to separation and isolation. If the Humanists and the Neoplatonists had believed that rhetoric and magic, respectively, were instruments by means of which they could bridge the distance between signs and referents, and thus exercise a power of control over their world, Ariosto certainly challenged their optimistic perspective, while simultaneously questioning the very essence of his own poetic pursuit.

Antonella Ansani QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

NOTES

[1] Attilio Momigliano, *Saggio sull' "*Orlando Furioso.*"* For a more detailed interpretation of Atlante as poet figure, see Albert R. Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony* 359-70; Mary Farrel, "Mentors and Magi in Ariosto and Rabelais" 45-55; and David Quint, "The Figure of Atlantes: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poem" 77-91. In his article, Quint proposes the interesting idea that Atlante represents Boiardo rather than Ariosto, recognizing all the same the poetic role of this character.

[2] Patricia Parker, in her book *Inescapable Romance* has remarked that "Ariosto, like Spenser after him, often introduces the characters of his poem by the way in which they first appear to other characters, and the deceptive nature of appearance, and the errors it leads to, become part of the labyrinthine 'selva oscura'" (22). We will see how in *Il negromante* Iachelino will be introduced using the same technique.

[3] *Orlando Furioso,* translated by Barbara Reynolds. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

[4] This thief – whether he was a mortal being
Or and infernal fiend I cannot say –

My lovely and beloved lady seeing,
As when a falcon swoops to seize its prey,
Dropped like a plummet and, the soldiers fleeing,
The startled damsel snatched and bore away.
The whole of this assault escaped my eye
Until I heard her calling from on high.

[5] *Falcone* and *nibbio* are predatory birds, often called in Italian *uccelli da rapina*, and the nature of their greed is marked more by violence than by fraud.

[6] I knew that demon masons of ill fame
With incense, exhalations and weird chants
Had clad the castlewalls with finest steel,
Forged in the firesand chilled in streams of Hell.

[7] Now on Gradasso, now Ruggiero, fall
On brow, on breast, on back, redoubled blows.
The strokes they aim avail them not at all,
Such prowess at evading them he shows.
By his gyrations he can soon forestall
Their moves, but what his next is neither knows,
They cannot tell, his dazzling feints so blind them,
If he is now before them or behind them.

[8] His shield in a vermilion cloth was draped.
In his right hand he held an open book,
Whence marvellous phenomena he shaped:
A lance which hurtled through the air and took
His adversary by surprise, who gaped
At nothingness, with an astonished look;
Or with a dagger or a club he smote
From far away, by a control remote.

His horse was not a fiction, but instead
The offspring of a griffin and a mare.
Its plumage, forefeet, muzzle, wings and head
Like those of his paternal parent were.
The rest was from its dam inherited.
It's called a hippogriff. Such beasts, though rare,
In the Rhiphaean mountains, far beyond
The icy waters of the north, are found.

By magic arts he brought it to the West.
Then with determination and insistence
He straightway set himself to train the beast.
Within a month, by patience and persistence,
He reined and saddled it. At his behest
It bore him now without the least resistance
On earth and in the air – no magic creature,
But real and true, a prodigy of Nature.

The rest of the magician's stock-in-trade,
Unlike the horse, was supernatural.

This mattered little to the valiant Maid.
The ring, she knew, made her invulnerable.

[9] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 6.765-86. Many different sources contribute to the creation of the hippogryph. For a detailed analysis of this winged horse and its sources, see Pio Rajna, *Le fonti dell'Orlando Furioso* 114, 120; Ascoli 246-57, and Marianne Shapiro, *The Poetics of Ariosto* 111-22.

[10] Ludovico Ariosto, "Satira VI" in *The Satires of Ludovico Ariosto* 561-71. Translated by Peter Desa Wiggins. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

[11] See Rajna 120-22; Ascoli 166; and Miranda Johnson Haddad, "Ovid's Medusa in Dante and Ariosto: The Poetics of Self-Confrontation" 211-25.

[12] The shield appending to his saddle-bows,
Which in its silken covering he hid,
To the recumbent Maid on foot he goes.
She, like a wolf in ambush for a kid,
Awaits him and, as soon as he is close,
Leaps up and grasps him in a single bid
To overpower him. The wretch, alas!
Has left his book of magic on the grass.

[13] The valiant maid thus answered him: "I choose
To free Ruggiero; nothing you can say
Will alter my resolve. Your shield and horse
I take as mine by right, no longer yours.

But even were they yours to give and take,
It seems to me they would be poor exchange.
You say you hold Ruggiero for his sake,
You save him from his evil stars. How strange!
Either the heavens' portent you mistake,
Else, though you clearly see, you cannot change
His fate. You cannot now foretell your own!
How can another's doom to you be known?"

[14] See Nancy Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance* 53.

[15] For a discussion of the theological aspect of poetry in the Renaissance, see Charles Trinkhaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought,* in particular the chapter "From Theologia Poetica to Theologia Platonica," 2: 683-721. See also Fabio Troncarelli, "*Musarum sacerdos*. Il poeta vate, modello mitico dei rapport tra letteratura ed ermetismo" 11-33.

[16] See Ludovico Ariosto, *Commedie* 183-260.

[17] But you must remember that this is carnival time and people disguise themselves. The fashions that some wear today were worn by others yesterday and will be passed on to still others tomorrow. *The Comedies of Ariosto*, translated and edited by Edmond M. Beame and Leonard G. Sbrocchi. All subsequent translations are from this edition.

[18] For the relevance of Carnival as one of the rites at the very core Italian comedy, see Paolo Toschi, *Le origini del teatro italiano* 105-343. According to Toschi, the public confession of the sins of society is the central moment of the Carnival rite, as well as of all other rites of fertility and renewal. In sixteenth-century Italy, Carnival was still very much perceived as a rite and thus, Toschi concludes, the satire of the vices and of the

sins of society, and the disclosure of the intrigues and of the weaknesses which are represented in the comedy, seem to fulfill the same need of ritual public confession.

[19] On the subject of magic in the Renaissance, see the groundbreaking works of D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, and Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*.

[20] Cint: He told me that, when he wants to, he can make the night light up and the day grow dark.
Tem: I can do the same thing.
Cint: How?
Tem: If I light a lamp during the night and close the shutters during the day.
Cint: Oh, you blockhead! I'm telling you that he blots out the sun throughout the world and illuminate the night everywhere.
Tem: the grocers ought to pay him well.
Cint: Why?
Tem: Because he could lower or raise the price of oil and wax as he pleases.
. . . .
Cint: Are you making fun of him, and do you think that these are stories? Well, what do you say to this? He can become invisible whenever he wishes.
Tem: Invisible? Have you ever seen him, Master?
Cint: You idiot! How can you see him if he's invisible?

[21] Haven't you noticed that as soon as someone becomes a *podestà*, a commissariat, a provisioner, a tax collector, a judge, a notary, or a paymaster he puts off his human form completely and takes on that of a wolf or a fox or of some bird of prey?

[22] To tell you the truth, I, myself, would place very little credence in these spirits; but the example of great men-princes and prelates-who do, leads me, the humblest of servants, to believe also.

[23] My master, Jachelino, certainly has great confidence in himself; for while he hardly knows how to read and write, he nevertheless professes to be a philosopher, an alchemist, a doctor, an astrologer, a magician, and even a conjurer of spirits. Although he's called the Astrologer par excellence, just as Virgil is known as the Poet and Aristotle as the Philosopher, he knows as much as much about these and other sciences as a donkey or an ox knows about playing an organ. But with a face as motionless as marble, with stories and lies, and no other skills, he swindles people and confounds their minds. Thus, he benefits and makes me benefit from the riches of others-with the help of folly, which abounds in the world.

[24] On the overwhelming presence of magic and astrology in Ariosto's times, both in their more popular and intellectual aspects, see Albano Biondi, "Streghe ed eretici nei domini estensi all'epoca dell'Ariosto" 165-99; and Cesare Vasoli, "L'astrologia a Ferrara tra la metà del Quattrocento e la meta del Cinquecento" 469-94.

[25] Don't think it strange if you hear that wild animals and trees followed Orpheus from place to place; and that by their singing Amphion in Greece and Apollo in Phrygia imbued stones with such lust that the began mounting one another-as many as you here would do if given the opportunity. By this means they built the walls of Thebes and those of Priam's city. And so [you should not be surprised] to find that the whole city of Cremona, with its entire population, has come here today.

[26] With their good style and more with their good works, they persuaded men to join together and to give up eating acorns, which forced them to live dispersed throughout the forests. They persuaded the more robust, whose strength had been thus far employed in

stealing wives and flocks and food from weaker men, to submit to laws and to begin with their plows to turn the soil and to harvest with the sweat of their brows the fruit of justice. Thus writers convinced the unlearned populace that, with the sound of their sweet lyres, Phoebus built Troy, and Amphion, Thebes, and that they caused stones to tumble down from lofty mountains, and that with his songs Orpheus lured tigers and lions from their gloomy lairs.

[27] Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*: "While man still roamed the woods, Orpheus, the holy prophet of the gods, made them shrink from bloodshed and brutal living; hence the fable that he tamed tigers and ravening lions; hence too the fable that Amphion, builder of Thebes's citadel, moved stones by the sound of his lyre, and led them whither he would by his supplicating spell. In days of yore, this was wisdom, to draw a line between public and private rights, between things sacred and things common, to check vagrant union, to give rules for wedded life, to build towns, and grave laws on tables of wood; and so honor and fame fell to bards and their songs as divine" (482-83).

[28] Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* 76.

[29] Angelo Poliziano, "Oratio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvis": "It was [rhetoric] alone which originally brought together, within the walls of a city, those men who before were scattered in the fields; it made them cooperate while they previously went their own way; it joined them with laws, customs and with a civic education. For this reason, since then, all well ordered and civilized cities have flourished through the high art of eloquence, and eloquence has acquired there the highest honors" (883-85).

[30] See Charles Trinkaus, *In our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought,* 683-721; and Ascoli 107-20.

[31] They'll be able to tell you what you want to know about Cremona's coming here. I cannot tell you anything else except that, to please you all the more, she has brought with her a new comedy called the Necromancer. Now it will no longer seem such a miracle to you that she is here, for you have already come to the conclusion that the necromancer in our story has called upon the devil to transport her here through the air; but, even if it were so, it would be a miracle just the same.

[32] While I underscore the relevance of the pseudonyms preferred by Iachelino in order to identify him as a poet-figure, I.A. Portner, in his essay "A Non-Performance of *Il Negromante*" remarks that these names support his theory that behind the necromancer lies a figuration of Leo X: Leo, as pope, is Peter, and Giovanni was his Christian name before being elevated (322).

[33] Like gypsies, we go from place to place, and wherever he passes he leaves his imprint like a snail or, for a more fitting comparison, like fire or lightning; and in each place, in order to disguise himself, he changes his name, his dress, and his country. Now he calls himself Peter, now John; now he pretends to come from Greece, now from Africa. In reality, he is a Jew, and he was among those who were expelled from Castile. It would be a long story if I were to tell you how many men he has cheated and robbed; how many poor homes he has broken up, how many he has tainted with adultery by pretending that he would make barren wives pregnant or by pretending to remove suspicion and discord that arise between husbands and wives.

[34] There are some animals that are only useful for eating, like the pig. There are others which, if you keep them, provide for you daily; and, when in the end they can give no more, you eat them for supper or dinner. Such are the cow, the ox, or the sheep. There are still others which, when alive, bring you handsome profits and are worthless when

dead, like the horse, or the dog, or the donkey. In the same way one finds considerable differences among men.

[35] See Luigi Scorrano, "La 'gran confidenzia' di mastro Iachelino e altre osservazioni sul *Negromante,*" who first pointed out and analyzed Ariosto's insistence on the zoological nomenclature in this comedy.

[36] I come to pay my respects to the mightiest of all magicians, to bow to my idol, to whom I address all my vows, offerings, and sacrifices; for you're my good fortune. Ah! Master, I cannot express the warm feelings I have for you.

[37] Astr: I have a hundred sure and easy ways to send you. If I want to, I can make you take the form of a dog or a cat. Now, what would you say if you found yourself transformed into something very small like a mouse?

Cam: Could you perhaps also change me into a flea or a spider?

[38] For the metaphorical opposition fox/lion, see Cicero, *De officiis* 1.13.14; Dante, *Inferno* 27.73-78; and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe* ch. 18.

[39] Cam: This letter comes from those hands that are whiter than milk, whiter than snow.
. . . .
Astr: Before that it came from the alabaster or the Ligurian marble of her bosom, where it lay between two small and fragrant apples.
Cam: Then this happiest of papers comes from the beautiful bosom of my sweet Emilia?
Astr: Her lovely hand then took it from there and gave it to me.
. . . .
Cam: Oh, you lucky paper, oh, you blessed letter; how fortunate is your lot! . . . . Oh, you fortunate linen, you who are more honored as fragile paper than you ever would be as cloth, even if you had become the tunic of some would-be prince, for my beloved mistress has deigned to write her thoughts upon you!

[40] Eugenio Donato, "'Per selve e boscherecci labirinti': Desire and Narrative Structure in Ariostos's *Orlando Furioso*" 33-62.

[41] The role of Camillo as reader is emphasized in this scene through Nibbio's sharply ironic words. Camillo is so excited by Emilia's letter that he keeps interrupting the reading to express his own feelings:

O anima
mia, o vita mia, o luce mia! Mi cavano
queste parole il cor. *Vi prego e supplico*
per quanto ben mi volete . . . . Fortissimo
scongiur! (809-13)

Nibbio, who is eavesdropping on the conversation between Camillo and Iachelino, makes fun of Camillo, while at the same time pointing out Camillo's role as reader: "(debbe essere materia difficile / che vien di parte in parte commentandola)" (813-14).

[42] E vi confessa l'autore avere in questo e Plauto e Terenzio seguitato, de li quali l'un fece Cherea per Doro, e l'altro Filocrate per Tindaro, e Tindaro per Filocrate, l'uno ne lo *Eunuco*, l'altro ne li *Captivi*, supponersi: perchè non solo ne li costumi, ma ne li argumenti ancora de le fabule vuole essere de li antichi e celebrati poeti, a tutta sua possanza, imitatore; e come essi Menandro e Apollodoro e li altri Greci ne le lor latine comedie seguitoro, egli così ne le sue vulgari i modi e i processi de' latini scrittori schifar

non vuole. Come io vi dico, da lo *Eunuco* di Terenzio e da li *Captivi* di Plauto ha parte de lo argumento de li suoi *Suppositi* transunto, ma sì modestamente però che Terenzio e Plauto medesimo, risapendolo, non l'arebbono a male, e di poetica imitazione, che di furto più tosto, li darebbono nome (*Commedie* 62).

[43] Giuseppe Mazzotta has pointed out that "when Thomas Aquinas draws the theological distinction between *violentia* and *fraus*, he focuses on *rapina* and *furtum*, as an illustration of this difference: 'si occulte unus rem alterius accipiat vocatur furtum, si autem manifeste, vocatur rapina.' Aquinas' connection between fraud and theft as acts of concealment may account for the metaphorics of hiding and thievery in *Inferno* XXVI" (*Dante, Poet of the Desert* 95). Mazzotta's indication concerning the canto of Ulysses proves to be useful in understanding the implications of Ariosto's statement on imitation. It is precisely because the act of imitation is performed "sì modestamente" that the connection between imitation, theft and fraud is illuminated in spite of, or better, because of, the disclaimer of thievery.

[44] On the value of fraud in the *Furioso*, Ascoli remarks: "Time and again, Ariosto valorizes the use of fraud as a weapon to combat the fraudulent weapons of evil, even as he leaves the implication that this mimetic use may finally collapse the distinction between good and evil. Alcina's fraud consists in making lies appear to be the truth; Astolfo as Pier delle Vigne tells truths, which are taken for lies; Melissa uses fraud to expose the truth about lying Alcina . . . . Fraud is given positive, though heavily qualified, ethical status . . . . And even as Ariosto exposes his own and other poetry as lying madness, he doubles back to imply that the double transparency of *his* lying, its superficial fantasy, make it a possible vehicle for truth, a far more certain one than other texts which strive for verisimilitude, insisting all the while on their own virtue, sanity, and veracity" (255-56).

[45] Patricia Parker has analyzed *fortuna* and *providenza* in the *Orlando Furioso* as the two forces which, while apparently controlling the openness and closure of the text, are in reality totally in the author's hands. She affirms: "'Fortuna' often keeps events in the poem from reaching their expected end but is as transparently the agent of the author" (*Inescapable Romance* 33). By the same token "the exercise of closure, under the sign of a guiding Providence, remains a purely literary *tour de force*, a demonstration that the author of this 'varia tela' knows as well as the Weaver fates (34.89) how to bring his carefully woven 'text' to an end" (53).

[46] Eugenio Garin, "Considerazioni sulla magia," *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 182-83.

"The astrologist's starting point is the need to convince, to persuade the forces of nature, by allying with some in order to battle the others, putting in play all of our resources to defeat our adversaries." (my translation)

[47] On the theme of dislocation in *Il Negromante* as an emblem of Ariosto's concern for modernity's crisis, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The Theater of Creation and Re-Creation" 137-44.

[48] See Jack D'Amico, "Poetic and Theatrical Perspectives in Ariosto's *Il Negromante*; and Jonson's *The Alchemist* 312-322.

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