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Cantus Interruptus in the *Orlando Furioso*

Daniel Javitch

One of the characteristic features of a *romanzo* like the *Orlando Furioso* is the recurring interruption of the narrative strands that make up its interwoven plot. In order to keep developing these strands in each canto, or eventually to unite some of them, Ariosto is regularly compelled to abandon one strand and take up another. The need for such interruptions becomes particularly apparent when one realizes that two strands cannot be brought together until the events in one have caught up with the events in the other. In Canto VIII, for example, when Angelica is about to be sacrificed to the Orca on the island of Ebuda (VIII. 66-68), the episode must be interrupted before the monster devours its prey since none of the protagonists who might rescue Angelica is yet in a position to do so. In fact the outcome of her dire predicament has to remain suspended until the end of Canto X when Ruggiero's aerial travel eventually brings him to remote Ebuda in time to save the damsel from her plight. To be sure, Ariosto does not just interrupt a strand of narrative because its sequel depends on the development of another. His shifts of narrative within a canto are also prompted by his predilection for *varietà,* one of the governing artistic principles of his poem. Whenever, in fact, the narrator explains or justifies his shifts it is almost always on the grounds that *varietà* calls for such transitions. Here, for example, near the end of Canto XIII is how Ariosto explains the shift from Bradamante's search for Ruggiero in the enchanted palace to the start of Agramante's offensive against Charlemagne:

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Ma lasciàn Bradamante, e non v'incresca
udir che cosí resti in quello incanto;
che quando sarà il tempo ch'ella n'esca,
la farò uscire, e Ruggiero altretanto.
Come raccende il gusto il mutar esca,
cosí mi par che la mia istoria, quanto
or qua or là più varïata sia,
meno a chi l'udirà noiosa fia.

(XIII. 80)[1]

Although structural necessity or *varietà* may serve to explain *why* interruptions of narrative occur with such frequency in the cantos of the *Furioso,* they do not explain the abrupt and disquieting manner in which they usually occur. When Ariosto shifts from one narrative strand to another, one of his favorite tactics is to suddenly interrupt the story he abandons just as the reader grows absorbed in its unfolding. Among the many examples that could be cited, let me begin with a typical one that occurs in Canto XI. Near the beginning of this canto, after Angelica has managed to escape Ruggiero's sexual assault, the latter, left abandoned and forlorn, is eventually distracted by the din of a duel between a Giant and a knight. As he watches the Giant overcome the knight and unlace his helmet for the kill, Ruggiero recognizes that the victim is none other than Bradamante, whereupon he rushes to save her. The Giant, however, seizing the stunned Bradamante, rushes off with her, furiously pursued by Ruggiero. And just as the chase reaches a crescendo, the narrator suddenly interrupts the action and resumes Orlando's adventures:

Vede Ruggiero quanto il suo aiuto importa,
e vien correndo a piú poter; ma quello
con tanta fretta i lunghi passi mena,
che con gli occhi Ruggier lo segue a pena.

Cosí correndo l'uno, e seguitando
l'altro, per un sentiero ombroso e fosco,
che sempre si venía piú dilatando,
in un gran prato uscìr fuor di quel bosco.
Non piú di questo; ch'io ritorno a Orlando,
che 'l fulgur che portò già il re Cimosco,
avea gittato in mar nel maggior fondo,
acciò mai piú non si trovasse al mondo.

(XI. 20-21)

[1] For similar comments see II. 30 and VIII. 29. Here and henceforth I quote from L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso,* a cura di L. Caretti (Torino, 1966).

The acceleration of the tempo, the heightening of tension before the unexpected shift, the defiance of formal expectation by making the break occur in mid-octave: these are regular tactics of the poet when he interrupts episodes within cantos. And as in this example, Ariosto almost always chooses to interrupt before the action described reaches any conclusion, frequently at a tense or suspenseful moment when the reader's involvement or curiosity is fully aroused. As I mentioned earlier, necessary though it is for the poet to abandon one narrative and resume the progress of another, his interruptions need not be as abrupt and disquieting as he likes to make them. And if his intent to delight the reader with *varietà* serves to explain the frequency of his shifts, it does not explain why these shifts are so sudden and premature.

What, then, are Ariosto's motives for this recurring technique? The usual explanation is that such sudden and premature interruptions serve to arouse the reader's suspense and therefore prompt him to read on in order to discover the outcome of the action left unresolved. Ariosto's first sympathetic critics had already justified his interruptions on these grounds. Here, for instance, is what Giraldi had to say on the matter in his *Discorso intorno al comporre dei romanzi* (1554):

> . . . Perché avendosi gli scrittori de' romanzi prese le azioni di molti da principio, non hanno potuto continuare di canto in canto una materia, essendo elle tutte insieme congiunte. Ma è stato lor mestieri, per condur l'opera al fine, poiché hanno detto d'un lor personaggio, frapporvi l'altro e rompere la prima materia ed entrare nei fatti d'un altro, e con questo ordine continuare le materie insino al fine dell'opera: la qual cosa hanno fatto con maraviglioso artificio. Perocché in questo lor troncar le cose, conducono il lettore a tal termine, prima che le tronchino, che gli lasciano nell'animo un ardente desiderio di tornare a ritrovarla: il che è cagione che tutto il poema loro sia letto, rimanendo sempre le principali materie imperfette insino al compimento dell'opera.[2]

Similarly, in *I Romanzi,* also published in 1554, G. B. Pigna maintained that the *romanzo*'s premature interruptions serve to arouse the desire to continue reading. But he was more specific than Giraldi, and the instances he provided to illustrate the kind of interruption that achieves this effect are particularly common in the *Furioso.* When the *romanzatore* suspends his narratives, Pigna explains:

[2] G. B. Giraldi Cinzio, *Discorso intorno al comporre dei Romanzi* (1554), in *Scritti Critici,* a cura di C. G. Crocetti (Milano, 1973), p. 68.

> Tralascia ò quando il tempo dà che s'interponga, ò quando nol dà. . . . Quando nol dà, l'animo resta sospeso. & ne nasce perciò un desiderio che fa diletto: essendo che un certo ardore è causato, che è di dover la fine della cosa sentire. come in sul bello d'una tempesta ritirarsi, ò nel tempo che due sono per menar le mani, ò che una guerra si prepari, ò da un luogo levar uno & à mezza strada & anche prima l'abbandonarlo, & far altre cose cosi fatte. Et ciò piú s'usa che il primo modo: conciosia cosa che il compositore di farne sempre piú innanzi andare s'ingegna.[3]

Giraldi's and Pigna's views were challenged, as I will show later, by literary critics in their own time, but most modern commentators seem to share their opinion that the function of Ariosto's premature interruptions was to arouse suspense and thereby keep the reader engaged. Pio Rajna did recognize other playful motives in these interruptions but by insisting on Ariosto's debt to Boiardo, whose narrative breaks in the *Innamorato* were ostensibly designed to arouse the reader's curiosity and interest, he overlooked the more subversive aspects of the sudden shifts in the *Furioso.* More recent studies of Ariosto's narrative technique, like the one by Delcorno Branca, indicate that the interruptions achieve other effects—mnemonic ones, for instance—in addition to producing suspense. But none of these commentators challenges Giraldi's and Pigna's claim that, by leaving the reader in suspense, the interruptions make him yearn to continue.[4]

If one tests this claim, however, one soon realizes that it applies mainly to one kind of interruption in the *Furioso:* the kind found at the ends of cantos. A recurring tactic of Ariosto's is to defy the expectation of closure at the end of a canto by terminating it at the start or at the height of a dramatic episode or action. However frustrating the reader may find it to be left hanging at the end of a canto he is not deprived of continuity for very long since, after an initial exordium, the beginning of the next canto resumes and usually completes the action or the episode that was cut off. The reader yearns to continue reading after the break at the end of a

[3] *I romanzi di M. Giovan Battista Pigna* (Vinegia: V. Valgrisi, 1554), pp. 44-45.

[4] For Pio Rajna's comments on narrative transitions in the *Furioso,* and especially on their precedence in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato,* see *Le Fonti dell'Orlando Furioso* (Bologna, 1900), pp. 143-145. Subsequent commentary on Ariosto's interruptions can be found in H. Hauvette, *L'Arioste et la poésie chevaleresque à Ferrare au début du XVI^eme^ siècle* (Paris, 1927), pp. 270-277; G. B. Bronzini, *Tradizione di stile aedico dai cantari al "Furioso"* (Firenze, 1966), pp. 103-114; Daniela Delcorno Branca, *L'Orlando Furioso e il romanzo cavalleresco medievale* (Firenze, 1973), pp. 30-51. Delcorno Branca makes some useful observations on the innovative and more complex aspects of the *Furioso's* interruptions in comparison to prior *romanzi* but she does not discuss their more subversive effects.

canto, not only because his suspense has been aroused but also because he has come to expect that the story will be resumed almost immediately in the following canto.

Though such interruptions at canto ends are ostensibly devices to captivate the reader and make him continue, interruptions within cantos cannot be said to serve the same purpose. These internal interruptions are not less suspenseful, but the sequel to a narrative interrupted within a canto comes much too late, or is deferred by too many intervening distractions, to gratify the desire aroused at the moment of rupture. For example, Ruggiero's heated chase of the Giant bearing off Bradamante, interrupted as we saw at XI.21, is not resumed until a canto later at XII.16. The suspense we were left in when the chase was interrupted quickly dissipates in that interval once our attention turns to Orlando's exploits, particularly his valiant rescue of Olimpia sacrificed, like Angelica, to the Orca. Obviously, by XI.37 when Orlando is in the midst of battling the Orca, or, at XII.7 when he is himself furiously pursuing a knight who appears to have kidnapped Angelica, one is reading on not to find out how Ruggiero's chase of the Giant turned out but because one is fully engrossed by the separate intervening narrative. In fact, by the time the narrator brings us back to Ruggiero's chase and its outcome we hardly care about it. We may recall the frustration of being deprived of knowing the outcome a canto earlier, but none of the suspense and curiosity aroused at that point remains to be gratified when the interrupted action is resumed. The gaps between the interruption and resumption of an episode are occasionally so wide that the reader virtually forgets what was taking place in the episode so long abandoned, absorbed though he was in that situation when it was interrupted.[5] But it is not just because the sequels of interrupted episodes are deferred for so long that he loses interest in their outcomes. What prevents the reader from remaining interested in the outcome of an interrupted action is the captivating narrative in the segment or segments that replace the one interrupted and that will, in turn, be interrupted at a premature and frustrating moment. As the reader moves from one such rupture to another it

[5] For example, the story of Mandricardo's romance with Doralice is only resumed at XXIII. 70 after having been interrupted at XIV. 64. When Angelica comes upon a wounded young man at XII. 65 her story has to be interrupted until Medoro has entered the poem and his wounding has taken place. Still, the "ripresa" of Angelica's encounter with Medoro is postponed until XIX. 17, by which time the reader virtually forgets her situation, suspended seven cantos earlier.

becomes apparent to him that, unlike the interruptions at canto ends which leave him briefly deprived, if he reads on, Ariosto's interruptions within cantos leave him unrequited but without the prospect of gratification.

The sequence of interruptions occurring from Canto XVI to Canto XVIII provides perhaps the clearest proof that Ariosto's primary motive in making such abrupt breaks was to frustrate the reader by repeatedly depriving him of the comforts of continuity. In this segment of the poem, the narrative constantly shifts from the epic conflict within and around Paris under siege to Middle Eastern adventures, primarily those of Grifone at Damascus. Aside from providing *varietà,* there is no need for the narrator's repeated suspension of either the epic struggle or Grifone's exploits—neither strand of narrative is interrupted because it must await developments in other strands to be continued. As a result, suspenseful though they are, the interruptions in this section of the poem seem more gratuitous than elsewhere. That is precisely why they are so telling and deserve closer examination.

As it reaches its end, Canto XVI moves from the battle raging outside Paris between Agramante's troops and those of the Christians to Rodomonte's single-handed slaughter, arson, and destruction inside the walls of the city. When Charlemagne, engaged on another front, is alerted to Rodomonte's terrible havoc, he prepares to confront the Saracen and the canto closes as he summons the stoutest available knights to assist him. After the usual exordium, Canto XVII resumes with Charlemagne's efforts to drive Rodomonte out of Paris. Haranguing his retainers to display their former courage, Charlemagne leads a counterattack against the single pagan warrior but at the moment he and his knights close in to strike Rodomonte, the action is abruptly cut off as the narrator shifts back to Grifone's arrival at Damascus:

> Al fin de le parole urta il destriero,
> con l'asta bassa, al Saracin adosso.
> Mossesi a un tratto il paladino Ugiero,
> a un tempo Namo et Ulivier si è mosso,
> Avino, Avolio, Otone e Berlingiero,
> ch'un senza l'altro mai veder non posso:
> e ferîr tutti sopra a Rodomonte
> e nel petto e nei fianchi e ne la fronte.
>
> Ma lasciamo, per Dio, Signore, ormai
> di parlar d'ira e di cantar di morte;

e sia per questa volta detto assai
del Saracin non men crudel che forte:
che tempo è ritornar dov'io lasciai
Grifon, giunto a Damasco in su le porte
con Orrigille perfida, e con quello
ch'adulter era, e non di lei fratello.

(XVII. 16-17)

Left anxious to know the outcome of the attack against Rodomonte at the end of ottava 16 the reader is suddenly deprived of the sequel, never to be properly gratified. To be sure the imminent struggle will be resumed a canto later (at XVIII. 8), but by then his desire to know the outcome will have disappeared. Even the frustration caused by the break in continuity does not last long for the reader, distracted as he becomes after the shift to the Orient by the story of Norandino and Lucina (XVII. 26-62), and the tournament at Damascus and Grifone's valorous jousting there. Particularly engrossing is Grifone's predicament after he finds himself betrayed by Martano and Orrigille (XVII. 106-135). Martano, to summarize briefly, avoids reprisal for his shameful cowardice at the tournament by impersonating Grifone (after treacherously stealing his armor) and taking credit for his valiant performance. Grifone, on the other hand, forced to don Martano's armor, is mistaken for the coward and made to suffer ignominious punishment at the hands of the Damascans. Tied up and shoved into a cart he is hauled around the city and forced to bear the infamy wrongfully heaped upon him by the jeering populace. Eventually this mob runs him out of town and decides to unshackle him. No sooner are his limbs free, than Grifone grabs the sword and armor dragged with Martano's armor behind the cart. But as he begins to wreak vengeful fury on the unsuspecting mob the canto is brought to a sudden halt:

Sí tosto a pena gli sferraro i piedi
e liberârgli l'una e l'altra mano,
che tor lo scudo et impugnar gli vedi
la spada, che rigò gran pezzo il piano.
Non ebbe contra sé lance né spiedi;
che senz'arme venía il populo insano.
Ne l'altro canto diferisco il resto;
che tempo è ormai, Signor, di finir questo.

(XVII. 135)

Abrupt and tantalizing interruptions of this sort are common at canto ends and the reader presumes, on the basis of past experience, that by reading on his suspense will soon be assuaged. Indeed, after a short exordium, the first octaves of Canto XVIII resume the account of Grifone's revenge. In ten strokes of his sword he brings down thirty of his former captors. Those who can escape rush back screaming into the city. However, Grifone's fury knows no bounds and he proceeds to rush the gates of Damascus. Some attempt to raise the drawbridge as total havoc seizes the town. But as Grifone's assault is about to reach a peak the action is interrupted once again:

> Fur molti che temêr che 'l fier Grifone
> sopra le mura avesse preso un salto.
> Non vi sarebbe piú confusïone,
> s'a Damasco il soldan desse l'assalto.
> Un muover d'arme, un correr di persone,
> e di talacimanni un gridar d'alto,
> e di tamburi un suon misto e di trombe
> il mondo assorda, e 'l ciel par ne ribombe.
>
> Ma voglio a un'altra volta differire
> a ricontar ciò che di questo avenne.
> Del buon re Carlo mi convien seguire
> che contra Rodomonte in fretta venne,
> il qual le genti gli facea morire.
> Io vi dissi ch'al re compagnia tenne
> il gran Danese e Namo et Oliviero
> e Avino e Avolio e Otone e Berlingiero.
>
> (XVIII. 7-8)

The first interruption of Grifone's revenge at the close of Canto XVII was aggravating enough, however accustomed one may have become to such canto ends. But the frustration caused by this second interruption is much more pronounced, defying as it does the established norm that the start of a new canto will complete the action broken off at the end of the previous canto. By choosing, moreover, to make this second frustrating break in order to resume the combat between Charlemagne and the outnumbered Rodomonte, suspended a canto earlier, Ariosto reveals how unconcerned he is with delayed gratification when he defers the resolution of a dramatic action. Clearly, no satisfaction is to be had from discovering the outcome of the combat at this point. On the

contrary, the reader can only feel annoyed about this belated continuation of the duel inside Paris, costing as it does the interruption of an action in which he has become infinitely more absorbed.

However disappointed he may feel about being deprived of the outcome of Grifone's suspended revenge, the fickle reader does not remain preoccupied by that situation very long. For the narrator soon reengages him in the epic struggle between the Christians and the Saracens as he describes how Rodomonte is forced out of Paris after decimating its besieged inhabitants. He then devotes twenty octaves to the massive battle raging around Paris, gradually focusing on the outstanding feats of the young Saracen prince Dardinello. The latter's *aristeia* (XVIII. 47-58) is modelled on that of the young Pallas in *Aeneid,* X just before Pallas meets his tragic death at the hands of Turnus. To the extent that Ariosto's imitation is recognized it contributes to the sense of Dardinello's impending doom that builds up even as he overcomes one Christian knight after another. Dardinello's exploits become particularly engrossing at XVIII. 55-58 when he slays Lurcanio and is pursued by Ariodante, thirsting to avenge his brother. But Ariodante's bloody efforts to confront the Saracen prince are made in vain because Fortune, we are told, reserves a deadlier challenge for Dardinello that day:

> Fortuna sempremai la via lor tolse,
> che per tutto quel dí non s'accozzaro.
> A piú famosa man serbar l'un vòlse;
> che l'uomo il suo destin fugge di raro.
> Ecco Rinaldo a questa strada volse,
> perch'alla vita d'un non sia riparo:
> ecco Rinaldo vien: Fortuna il guida
> per dargli onor che Dardinello uccida.
>
> (XVIII. 58)

Yet just when Dardinello is about to encounter the more formidable Rinaldo, that is to say just before the moment of tragic pathos when Dardinello's fate turns—a pathos that depends for its effect on our continuing involvement with the young prince—Ariosto perversely interrupts the action to resume Grifone's vendetta against the Damascans:

> Ma sia per questa volta detto assai
> dei gloriosi fatti di Ponente.
> Tempo è ch'io torni ove Grifon lasciai,

che tutto d'ira e di disdegno ardente
facea, con piú timor ch'avesse mai,
tumultuar la sbigottita gente.

(XVIII. 59)

Once again, left hanging and deprived of the sequel to Dardinello's fatal day, the reader cannot care at this point how the situation at Damascus turns out, intensely preoccupied though he was with Grifone's revenge when it was interrupted fifty-one octaves earlier. Even though the continuity he yearned for then is now finally provided, frustration and alienation are the dominant effects produced by the sudden dislocation at XVIII. 59. So it was when the epic struggle was resumed after the interruption at XVIII. 8. How can it be said that such abrupt interruptions serve to heighten the reader's interest and to defer his pleasure when what awaits him at the point a narrative is resumed is the aggravation of another premature interruption?

Although the frustrating effects of Ariosto's interruptions are more pronounced and more frequent from Canto XVI to XVIII, one experiences these effects throughout the poem, especially in the first half of it. In general, what one remembers about the poet's technique of interruption and resumption within cantos is certainly not the pleasure of deferred gratification but the aggravation of being stopped short, of being drawn into narratives only to be pulled out of them and left deprived. Evident as it becomes that the abrupt ruptures within cantos are designed to leave the reader unrequited, more than temporarily, the majority of Ariosto's critics have refused to acknowledge this subversive motive. as though such a disregard for continuity would have to be deemed an artistic flaw.

Indeed, the few critics that recognized the alienating effects of Ariosto's interruptions were the sixteenth century opponents of the *romanzo* who considered its narrative ruptures an index of the genre's inferiority in comparison to classical epic. In his *Arte Poetica* (1563) when Antonio Minturno criticized such premature interruptions in the *romanzo* (with Ariosto's practice chiefly in mind), the point of his objection was that rather than kindling the reader's attention and prompting him on, they only annoyed and disengaged the reader. These sudden and untimely breaks in the narrative, Minturno writes,

> lascian negli animi de gli ascoltanti anzi molesto, che dilettevole. Percioche à niuno ragionevolmente dee piacere, che alcuna cosa interrotta gli sia, quando piú gli diletta. Né trovo esser vero,

Minturno maintains, challenging Giraldi's and Pigna's claims to the contrary,

> che l'attentione piú sen'accenda: ma piú tosto sene spenga. Conciosia, ch'ella sen'infiammi col desio d'intenderne il fine, non quando si tralascia la cominciata narratione per un'altra: ma quando per molti accidenti à quella istessa materia appertenenti s'indugia la finale essecutione.[6]

Minturno's neo-Aristotelian bias did not allow him to see the *romanzo*'s peculiar interruptions as anything but proof of the genre's structural defects even though that bias helped him to perceive correctly the frustrating effects such narrative shifts had on the reader. Still, it was virtually impossible for a critic like Minturno to acknowledge that Ariosto deliberately exploited the frustrating possibilities of the *romanzo*'s interruptions, and that he consciously sought to deprive the reader of continuity.

The same is true of Filippo Sassetti whose criticism of Ariosto's interruptions was a further effort to discredit the literary worth of the *Furioso*. But Sassetti's objections which appear in his unpublished "Discorso contro l'Ariosto" (ca. 1575-76) are more perceptive than Minturno's. After Sassetti points out that the necessary suspension of the *Furioso's* multiple narratives is an inherent structural flaw of the *romanzo* he condemns Ariosto for his premature interruptions. Note how he recognizes their subversive intent while objecting to them:

> l'essere il Poeta costretto in questo apparecchio a tralasciare le incominciate materie; et hora indietro rivolgersi, hora passare avanti senza havere alcun riguardo alla continuatione del tempo. et appunto quando egli comincia a muovere come se a sommo studio 'e volesse privare chi legge o ascolta di quel diletto; egli lascia la narratione incominciata saltando in un'altra materia quanto si voglia diversa da quella che egli aveva prima alle mani; quasi che piacevol cosa sia o possibile il sentir muovere l'animo in un tempo di moti contrarii da due oggetti diversi; et è questo errore stato notato come cosa fatta con arte e stimata cosa buona quella sospensione d'animo alla quale seguita l'oblivione; o almeno il raffredamento dell'affetto già a muoversi incominciato. . . .

As he continues to condemn Ariosto's premature breaks he provided a vivid and apt analogy to describe their aggravating effects:

[6] *L'Arte Poetica del Sig. Antonio Minturno* (Venetia: G. A. Valvassori, 1563), p. 35. Bernard Weinberg quotes and translates most of this passage when he discusses Minturno's criticism of the *romanzo* in *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1961), II, pp. 971-973.

> hora in questi tralasciamenti che sono nel Furioso pare che si senta il medesimo diletto che gusterebbe colui che con fretta andandosene colà dove egli desiderasse di ritrovarsi fusse da alcuno a viva forza ritenuto, per lasciarlo poi andare quando l'occasione fusse di già passata. . . .

Finally, Sassetti observes quite correctly that in the most recent printings of the *Furioso* the editors provide, at moments when narratives are interrupted, marginal indications alerting the reader where he can subsequently find them resumed, in the hope that this extratextual aid may alleviate the frustration of discontinuity:

> i rivenditori delle stampe hanno bene essi cognosciuto quanto ciò conturbi l'animo di chi legge o di chi ascolta, e per rimediare a questo inconveniente hanno, laddove le materie si troncano, segnato il numero delle carte e delle stanze dove si ripiglia la tralasciata narratione.[7]

Relatively unknown though they are, Sassetti's critical observations are precious since they attest how disquieting and frustrating Ariosto's interruptions were to some sixteenth century readers. His remarks also suggest ("et è questo errore stato notato come cosa fatta con arte e stimata cosa buona quella sospensione d'animo") that some of Ariosto's first readers appreciated his subversive strategies. Sassetti, of course, refuses to entertain the fact that the frustrating effects of Ariosto's narrative breaks were intentional and not, as he proposes, the result of the genre's structural flaws. It is unfortunate that his assessment of the rhetorical effects of the interruptions was so unsympathetic because, aside from failing to appreciate their deliberate design, his assessment was basically correct.

An analysis of Ariosto's premature transitions within cantos supports Sassetti's claim that one of their repeated effects is the reader's "raffredamento dell'affetto già a muoversi incominciato." It is also true that the poet often interrupts a segment of narrative "quando egli comincia a muovere come se a sommo studio 'e volesse privare chi legge o ascolta di quel diletto." Clearly, such effects were intentional. But why did he so often seek to deprive the reader of fulfillment in this way? The answer emerges when one considers the poet's thematic concerns and the common predica-

[7] Filippo Sassetti's "Discorso contro l'Ariosto," preserved in MS IX, 125, Biblioteca Nazionale Firenze, was eventually published by Giuseppe Castaldi in the *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei,* Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche. Serie Quinta. XXII (1913), 473-524. I quote from this edition, pp. 502-503. For more information about Sassetti's "Discorso" and its role in the *cinquecento* debate over the *Orlando Furioso* see Bernard Weinberg, *op. cit.,* II, pp. 973-978.

ment besetting the characters in the world of his poem. For one of the recurring afflictions in the realm of mutability Ariosto depicts is failed or frustrated expectation. We constantly witness individuals whose desires are left unrequited, whose pleasurable goals are either denied by unpredictable changes or granted too briefly or too late to be gratifying.[8] Such frustration is one of the few permanent conditions of man's existence in the world without stability or continuity represented in the *Furioso.* Ariosto does not simply allow his readers to observe this existential predicament as it is illustrated in the various stories of his *romanzo* but, to further impress it upon them, he subjects his readers to similar frustration by means of his narrative technique. The deprivation experienced by the reader when Ariosto prematurely interrupts his engrossing narratives is meant to *duplicate* the similar experience that so often besets various characters in his poem.

That the poet seeks and achieves this duplication becomes particularly obvious when both character and reader are made to suffer their frustrations simultaneously. Consider, for example, the memorable end of Canto X. Having just rescued the naked Angelica from being devoured by the Orca, Ruggiero carries her off on the Hippogriff. Suddenly, overwhelmed by sexual desire for Angelica, he alights in a meadow. While he frantically and clumsily tries to remove his armor in order to ravish the girl, the canto is abruptly brought to a halt as frustrating to the reader as Ruggiero's own predicament:

> Frettoloso, or da questo or da quel canto
> confusamente l'arme si levava.
> Non gli parve altra volta mai star tanto;
> che s'un laccio sciogliea, dui n'annodava.
> Ma troppo è lungo ormai, Signor, il canto,
> e forse ch'anco l'ascoltar vi grava:
> si ch'io differirò l'istoria mia
> in altro tempo che piú grata sia.
>
> (X. 115)

Considered in the context of what will then happen in Canto XI—the naked Angelica will manage to disappear before Ruggiero sheds his armor—this interruption immediately anticipates and is

[8] For a valuable discussion of the theme of frustrated expectation in Ariosto's poem, see D. S. Carne-Ross, "The One and the Many: A Reading of Orlando Furioso, Cantos 1 and 8, *Arion* V (1966), 195-234, and its sequel in *Arion,* new series, III (1976), 146-219. I am indebted to both these essays.

as aggravating as the *coitus interruptus* Ruggiero is made to suffer. As readers, of course, we are subjected repeatedly to such unpleasant interruptions but their equivalence to *coitus* denied is rarely made so explicit. And though the experience of frustration or deprivation we suffer at the hands of the narrator does not regularly occur at the same moment that it afflicts the characters, it is clear that Ariosto wants us to share, albeit in literary terms, this inevitable existential condition.

Ariosto's ability to convert the formal necessity of interrupting the plots of his *romanzo* into occasions that duplicate the wayward discontinuity of human existence portrayed in his poem is a remarkable achievement. It vividly illustrates how he generally exploited the structural properties of the genre he inherited to embody the mutable and discontinuous universe he wanted to portray. However, Ariosto's disquieting interruptions serve another function in addition to duplicating for the reader the frustration that so often besets the poem's characters. They are also meant to condition the reader for the time when his frustration will not be merely literary.

The recurring discrepancy between desire and its frustration experienced by Ariosto's characters is often a source of comedy in the *Furioso.* Yet the inability of the characters to cope with this discrepancy is not simply a laughing matter for the poet. After all, it is because of his failure to adjust to the radical frustration of his desire that Orlando goes raving mad in Canto XXIII. He is just the most notable of several victims in the poem who, for lack of flexibility, cannot bear up when their illusory wishes or expectations are shattered. Like Orlando, such victims are meant to impress upon us the terrible price it can cost to be unprepared, as we should be, when love or any of our desires are suddenly unrequited. In general, one of the poem's didactic aims, as I see it, is to make us aware that in a world without constancy, where human conduct is so unstable, we must be elastic enough to bear the unpredictable frustration of our designs and aspirations. This resilience can be developed, Ariosto seems to believe, by accustoming oneself to disappointment. One of the reasons, I propose, he so often cuts off his narratives to deprive us of fulfillment is to habituate us to this inevitable predicament. His efforts are successful because gradually, after being subjected to enough narrative ruptures, we do become accustomed to the sense of dislocation and deprivation they produce.

My discussion of these interruptions emphasized their frustrat-

ing effects, but there does come a point when one no longer feels so frustrated by them. It is hard to say precisely when the change occurs, however, since this must vary for each reader. Eventually, we grow more poised, we meet the discontinuity with more amused detachment once we learn to anticipate the likelihood of being left unsatisfied. We realize, after being alienated often enough, that it makes no sense to get so worked up about what is, after all, nothing but a fictive construct manipulated at the author's will. At the risk of forfeiting our involvement altogether Ariosto's interruptions succeed in making us recognize our susceptibility to fictive illusion while, in the process, they make us aware that something illusory should not so engage our affections but should be met with detachment and common sense. The poet does not take this risk for the fun of it but in the hope that we will transfer the saner responses he tries to develop in us as readers to similar situations in our lives. His poem offers to train us to confront actual frustrations or broken illusions with the same rational detachment we eventually acquire when its interruptions leave us unrequited. I do not mean to suggest that Ariosto believed his salutary interruptions would be sufficient or effective enough to make us immune to the world's flux. He was willing, as I propose, to jeopardize his poem's captivating make-believe and its continuity to make us more aware and therefore less vulnerable in the face of such flux. But he was too great a connoisseur of human susceptibility to believe that he could reform it. He knew all too well how deep is man's yearning for coherence and continuity, and how difficult it is to dislodge it. The very inability of subsequent readers to appreciate the deliberate alienating effects achieved by his interruptions would have hardly surprised Ariosto since such misunderstanding betrays man's foolish but persitent desire for continuity and completion. All the poet could do by exploiting the formal necessity of interruption in the inspired and subversive ways that he did was to prepare us for actuality and the sure frustration of desire.

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