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a cura di Anna Maria Cabrini

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ELEONORA STOPPINO

AMAZONIAN PAST. GENEALOGIES AND GENDER IN THE "ORLANDO FURIOSO"

1. *Intertextuality and the "Furioso"*

The sense of disorientation felt by the scholar when approaching the problem of intertextuality in the *Furioso* is well described in one of the poem's episodes: the frustrating attempt, on the part of Grifone and Aquilante, to kill Orrilo the thief:

> "Più volte l'han smembrato e non mai morto,
> né, per smembrarlo, uccider si potea;
> che se tagliato mano o gamba gli era,
> la rapiccava, che parea di cera.
>
> Or fin a' denti il capo gli divide
> Grifone, or Aquilante fin al petto.
> Egli dei colpi lor sempre si ride:
> s'adiran essi, che non hanno effetto.
> Chi mai d'alto cader l'argento vide,
> che gli alchimisti hanno mercurio detto,
> e spargere e raccor tutti i suo' membri,
> sentendo di costui, se ne rimembri.
>
> Se gli spiccano il capo, Orrilo scende,

né cessa brancolar finché lo trovi;
et or pel crine et or pel naso il prende,
lo salda al collo e non so con che chiovi.
Piglial talor Grifon, e 'l braccio stende,
nel fiume il getta, e non par ch'anco giovi;
che nuota Orrilo al fondo come un pesce,
e col suo capo salvo alla ripa esce."[1]

Like falling quicksilver, the different forms and traditions collected in the poem come together and separate in a continuous movement: it is almost impossible to see the junctions, to find points of discontinuity. As Marco Praloran has argued**,** Ariosto's ability at weaving different threads causes a sort of perceptive uncertainty.[2] Ariosto is taking to accomplishment the process of revitalization of the chivalric matter started by his predecessor Boiardo. Orrilo was already a character in Boiardo's poem, the first source of inspiration and *aemulatio* for Ariosto, as well as a mutilated body in need of re-unification.[3]

This body of sources, models, intertexts, intertwined and weaved by the poet, has constituted a labyrinth of references where critics have attempted to find their way from the Sixteenth century onwards. The most important critical work, in this respect, is arguably Pio Rajna's monumental *Le fonti dell'"Orlando furioso"*: itself a labyrinth of punctual references,

[1] L. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso secondo l'edizione del 1532 con le varianti delle edizioni del 1516 e del 1521*, a cura di S. Debenedetti e C. Segre, Bologna, Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1960, p. 450 (XV, 69, 5-8 and 70-71).

[2] See M. Praloran, *Tempo e azione nell'"Orlando furioso"*, Firenze, Olschki, 1994, p. 4.

[3] See M. M. Boiardo, *Inamoramento de Orlando*, Edizione critica a cura di A. Tissoni Benvenuti e C. Montagnani, Introduzione e commento di A. Tissoni Benvenuti, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1999, parte II, pp. 1636-1643 (III, ii, 45-60). The episode is abandoned in III, iii, 20-22, and never resumed in the *Inamoramento*. It is worth observing that both in the *Inamoramento* and in the *Furioso* the Orrilo episode is accompanied by metanarrative comments on the narrator's part.

both to medieval and to classical texts.[4] Rajna himself retells the poem, following his own *entrelacement*, in a process that tends to see stories to completion. Thus, the philologist often runs the risk of neutralizing the complex organizing strategy enacted by Ariosto on his models. Moreover, while making a claim to the neutral judgment of erudition, Rajna bases his work on precise assumptions on the hierarchies of artistic value. Originality is for him the central quality for the work of art. Even more importantly, he assumes that he and the poet share a hierarchical vision of literary texts, one that situates the medieval text well below the classics. I do not necessarily wish to argue that this is not the case for Ariosto; hierarchical thinking, however, is a concept that needs to be verified against the historical and cultural situation of fifteenth and early sixteenth century Ferrara as well as against Ariosto's strategies of composition.

The dichotomy of the medieval vs classical source has been at the core of the study of intertextuality in the *Orlando furioso*. Epic and romance, the two poles of the poem, have been linked with the different nature of its intertexts.[5] In this context, the coexistence of romance and classical models has often been interpreted as a sign of ironic treatment of the latter.[6] Daniel Javitch, focusing on classical sources or their medieval

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[4] See P. Rajna, *Le fonti dell'"Orlando furioso"*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1975 (reprint of the 1900 edition). On Rajna's work, see C. Segre, *Pio Rajna: le fonti e l'arte dell'"Orlando furioso"*, in "Strumenti critici", n. s., 5, 1990, pp. 315-327.

[5] See A. R. Ascoli, *Ariosto and the "Fier Pastor". Structure and Historical Meaning in "Orlando furioso"*, in "Renaissance Quarterly", 54, 2001, pp. 488-490. For studies on *epica* and *romanzo* in the *Orlando furioso*, see S. Zatti, *Il "Furioso" tra epos e romanzo*, Lucca, Pacini Fazzi, 1990; D. Quint, *The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poems*, in "Modern Language Notes", 94, 1979, pp. 77-91; R. Bruscagli, *Stagioni della civiltà estense*, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1983.

[6] See D. Javitch, *The "Orlando furioso" and Ovid's Revision of the "Aeneid"*, in "Modern Language Notes", 99, 1984), pp. 1029-1030. Moreover, such dichotomy has often obscured a third fundamental term in the construction of the poem: the humanistic source. Critics have often disregarded the presence of humanistic texts in the *Furioso*, and they seldom have studied the poem in the context of the humanistic debate on imitation. See C. Segre, *Leon Battista Alberti e Ludovico Ariosto*, in Id., *Esperienze*

rewriting, has recently cast light on some of Ariosto's imitative strategies. *Imitatio* in Ariosto, Javitch argues, is based upon the accumulation of sources, that is on the imitation of imitation. It is through the use of texts which imitated other texts that Ariosto realizes that particular effect of echoes and distantiation so typical of his poetry; and such strategy is not aimed at establishing competition between texts: Ariosto builds textual genealogies in order to free his writing from competitive pressure, and to show that there is no definitive or better version of a given *topos*.[7] Javitch's innovative explanation for the ironical strategy of the *Furioso* can be productively combined with Ascoli's interpretation of Ariosto's masterpiece as a text of crisis, in which *entrelacement* works as a moment of conflict and re-definition of different intertexts.[8] The relevance of hierarchy in the organization of intertexts, as it appears from a survey of Ariosto criticism, is crucial not only to the positivistic collection of sources undertaken by Pio Rajna but also to contemporary studies of the *Furioso*.

In the context of studies of intertextuality in the *Furioso*, medieval models tend to be disregarded. They have been seldom reconsidered systematically after Rajna's study, and Ariosto critics often marginalize them, labeling them as chivalric themes and motifs, linked to the

ariostesche, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1966, pp. 85-95. The study of the Ariostan poem would certainly benefit from a comparison with heclectic imitation practices such as that performed by Poliziano. See A. R. Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 28.

[7] Cf. D. Javitch, *The Imitation of Imitations in "Orlando furioso"*, in "Renaissance Quarterly", 38, 1985, pp. 238-239.

[8] See for instance A. R. Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance*, cit., p. 45: "I am attempting, in this chapter, to arrive at an understanding of the poem as "inter-text" in the wider possible sense – text dwelling between texts, past and future. The texts are around it, as con-texts which determine and bound its significance; but, surprisingly, they are also within it, absorbed as co-texts: cited and staged, faithfully or parodically re-presented, approvingly or polemically interpreted".

aristocratic atmosphere of the Este court.[9] Medieval texts would provide the matter, whereas classical texts would provide the style, the poetic form. It might sound as a paradox, then, that it is the medieval technique of textual organization called *entrelacement* – perfected in thirteenth century French texts such as the *Lancelot* or the *Tristan en prose* – which provides the macro-textual form for Ariosto's poem. It is within this form, that epic and chivalric themes find their space. The different status of different models increasingly becomes the central dimension of *Furioso* criticism.

Cesare Segre, in his fundamental *Intertestualità e interdiscorsività nel romanzo e nella poesia* surveys different kinds of research on the literary sources of the *Furioso*, linking them to the two main aspects of a text, semiotic and linguistic.[10] Referring to the concept of intertextuality as elaborated by Julia Kristeva on Bakhtinian linguistic theories, Segre points to the double nature of the texts, which are "prodotti linguistici, scomponibili in parole e sintagmi" and, at the same time, "prodotti semiotici, scomponibili in unità di contenuto".[11] The distinction assumes great relevance, Segre argues, for the analysis of the sources, where we have studies on the linguistic aspects and studies on the elements of the

[9] There are a few important exceptions: in particular, Daniela Branca and Marina Beer, who have studied thematic aspects; Michael Sherberg, who has focused his attention on a character in particular (Rinaldo); David Quint and Ronald Martinez have studied specific episodes where the intertextual strategy reveals a conscious use of medieval models. See D. Branca, *L'"Orlando furioso" e il romanzo cavalleresco medievale*, Firenze, Olschki, 1973; M. Beer, *Romanzi di cavalleria: il "Furioso" e il romanzo italiano del primo Cinquecento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1987; M. Sherberg, *Rinaldo. Character and Intertext in Ariosto and Tasso*, Stanford, Anma Libri, 1993; D. Quint, *The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poems*, cit., pp. 77-91; R. Martinez, *De-Cephalizing Rinaldo: The Money of Tyranny in Niccolò da Correggio's "Fabula de Cefalo" and in "Orlando Furioso" 42-43*, in "Annali d'Italianistica", 12, 1994, pp. 87-114.

[10] Cf. C. Segre, *Intertestualità e interdiscorsività nel romanzo e nella poesia*, in Id., *Teatro e romanzo. Due forme di comunicazione letteraria*, Torino, Einaudi, 1984, pp. 103-118.

[11] Cf. ibidem, p. 107.

plot. These two tendencies are clearly at play in *Furioso* criticism, as well as in the sharp divide between philologists and literary scholars on one side, anthropologists and comparatists on the other.

Whereas criticism has reached a high degree of sophistication in analyzing the classical intertexts,[12] there is no specific method to record and analyze the passage from the medieval text to the *Furioso*.[13] The central question, then, has historically been to establish hierarchies: cultural hierarchies, organizing texts of different times and cultures (classical and popular texts, for instance), and hierarchies endorsed and produced by the author himself, through the use of the *entrelacement* technique. It has never been thoroughly investigated whether different hierarchies correspond or diverge, or even if they demonstrably exist in the text. Throughout my work, I maintain the idea formulated by Segre – that Ariosto uses different models in a different way – as the fulcrum of the method of analysis, as well as the hypothesis in need of verification. That is to say, if we expect to find different strategies of imitation for the medieval-popular text and the classical/learned text, it is very likely that we apply a stylistic analysis when we find the latter and a thematic one when we find the former, thus fulfilling our own prophecy. However likely it be that these guidelines, established by centuries of study, are generally correct, I argue for a sustained effort to mix different approaches on different texts, making them collapse on each other, to open a space for the possibility that hierarchies of

[12] See E. Saccone, *Il soggetto del "Furioso"*, Napoli, Liguori, 1974; J. Sitterson, *Allusive and Elusive Meanings: Reading Ariosto's Vergilian Ending*, in "Renaissance Quarterly", 45, 1992, pp. 1-19; S. Jossa, *La fantasia e la memoria: intertestualità ariostesche*, Napoli, Liguori, 1996.

[13] The most systematic study is the investigation of the *entrelacement* structure in M. Praloran, *Tempo e azione nell'"Orlando furioso"*, cit. Luigi Blasucci, Miranda Johnson-Haddad, Maria Cristina Cabani, Segre and others have studied the influence of medieval classics such as Dante and Petrarca on the *Furioso*. A completely different chapter should be opened here on the studies of the *Inamoramento de Orlando* as a privileged intertext in the *Furioso*.

models are consciously built and exploited by Ariosto himself.

If the use of the medieval or chivalric intertext is structurally different from the one Ariosto reserves for the classical source, it is crucial to verify the possibility that we can instead use the same global method for the study of all intertextual phenomena in the poem. What follows is a basic outline of elements, or tools that can prove useful as a roadmap: global intertextuality, the study of the relation between text and intertext, but also between different intertexts; the cooperation of intra-textual with inter-textual analysis; the study of the intertext in its entirety, as to verify the presence of the so-called "vischiosità";[14] verification of the typologies of use of the intertext (whether the motifs, the lexicon, the stylistic formulae are used, and to what extent), and study of their interactions.

If the concept of multiple, conflicting hierarchies in the imitative strategy of the *Furioso* is in need of critical attention, even more crucial to a study of the poem is the connection between the hierarchical and the genealogical idea. In conducting a study of the *Furioso* centered on its intertextual strategies, I have concentrated on episodes where Rajna's guidance in the exegesis of the text is less illuminating. I observed that the episodes where the medieval intertexts are less conspicuous, but strongly present – at least in the frame of the narration – are the genealogical *excursus*, like the presentation of the Este descendence to Bradamante in canto III, or the appearance of the Este women in canto XIII or Cassandra's pavilion in canto XLVI. While Rajna tends to quote a source for every episode of the poem, the ones he does not wish to talk about are precisely

[14] Segre introduced the conceptual tool called "vischiosità" in his study of direct relations between texts: "Via via [...] che le coincidenze verbali toccano più ampi segmenti discorsivi, o, meglio ancora, che le coincidenze tematiche corrispondono a riprese verbali, incomincia a rivelarsi alla nostra osservazione qualche frammento della complessità linguistico-semiotica del testo imitato o citato o comunque ricordato" (cf. C. Segre, *Intertestualità e interdiscorsività nel romanzo e nella poesia*, cit., p. 109).

the dynastic inserts. Since most commentaries of the *Furioso* heavily depend on Rajna for their references, these episodes have received little critical attention. In particular, they have been ascribed essentially to the epic dimension of the poem, that is, the linear, centripetal narration of classical derivation.[15] To a closer analysis, however, these narrations prove to be built on more complicated basis than expected: they show details that are not totally congruent with their declared classical model. I propose that we read in the *Orlando furioso* a different epic dimension, not alternative but concurrent to the classical one: the structure of narrative generated in the Romance epic tradition. This perspective complicates the dichotomy between classical and medieval source, and brings us on a different, less philological or narratological territory.

The choice to study the textual genealogy of genealogical episodes leads to ask a fundamental question: whose destiny does the poem tell? Whose future and past are told in the ekphrastic scenes earlier mentioned? On one hand, the answer is immediately clear: the Este. The Este family is the fulcrum of the dynastic prophecies, and becomes the point of mediation and negotiation between the classical and the medieval poetics in the genealogy of the *Orlando furioso*. On the other hand, the principal and most of the times only addressee of the prophecies is, within the text, the heroine Bradamante. In the last few years, various critics have noted the centrality of this character to the plot of the *Furioso*;[16] a character that, being female, had been previously typified as 'woman warrior'. The

[15] See in particular S. Zatti, *Il "Furioso" tra epos e romanzo*, cit., *passim* and D. Quint, *The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poems*, cit., *passim*.

[16] See in particular P. J. Benson, *A Defense of the Excellence of Bradamante*, in "Quaderni d'Italianistica", 4, 1983, pp. 135-153; D. Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1990, pp. 72-125; V. Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. 227-253.

hypothesis I have formulated so far to explain Bradamante's role as an addressee all point to a deeply felt importance of the role of women in perpetuating a dynasty. It is crucial to insert this approach to a genealogy based on women within the larger discourse on the treatment of gender and female subjects in the poem, as well as within the historical and social practice of marriage and dynastic perpetuation in late fifteenth and early sixteenth Northern Italy.[17] The study of aspects of Ariosto's poetics (*imitatio*, *entrelacement*, the use of different intertexts and their status in the narration) becomes thus inextricably linked with the ideological framework of the poem. The study of the role of women within the dynamics of dynasty can enhance our understanding of the specific practice of the Este family. Historians have observed that the little court pursued a very aggressive marriage strategy;[18] likewise, literary scholars have noticed that the Este, probably more than any other comparable family in late medieval and Renaissance Northern Italy, had a very strong investment in the mythological discourse on their origins.[19] It is my contentions that these two sets of practices are linked to the poetic strategy pursued by Ariosto in the *Furioso*.

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[17] See in particular Ch. Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985; S. Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice. Twelve Essays on Patrician Society*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2000; J. F. Bestor, *Gli illegittimi e beneficiati della casa estense*, in *Il Rinascimento. Situazioni e personaggi*, a cura di A. Prosperi, Ferrara, Cassa di Risparmio di Ferrara – Gabriele Corbo Editore, 2000, pp. 77-102; Ead., *Marriage and Succession in the House of Este: A Literary Perspective*, in *Phaeton's Children: The Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, edited by D. Looney and D. Shemek, Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005, pp. 49-85.

[18] See for instance R. Iotti, *La politica dell'amore. Alcuni casi di alleanze matrimoniali in casa d'Este*, in *Gli Estensi I. La corte di Ferrara. Dalle origini al 1598*, a cura di R. Iotti, Modena, Il Bulino, 1998, pp. 146-181.

[19] See L. Chiappini, *Gli Estensi. Mille anni di storia*, Ferrara, Corbo, 2001; R. Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili. Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1995.

2. *Amazons and Fears of Illegitimacy*

Marfisa, Bradamante and the other women warriors that are so common in the renaissance chivalric tradition, like Rovenza, Ancroia, Trafata and Fanarda, or Pulci's Antea, are all individual warriors that also happen to be women. Like the warrior Camilla of Virgilian memory, they are members of an army with peculiar distinguishing features. What is, then, the distinction between these figures and their classical ancestors, the Amazons? Ariosto offers a possible answer to this question with the tale of the murderous women of cantos XIX and XX, introducing in his poem a state entirely composed of and ruled by female warriors. With this episode, a true Amazonian society enters the space of the poem and is the stage for the deeds of the other woman warrior of the text, Marfisa. Between the battlefield and the dynastic marriage, Bradamante embodies the conflicting dynamics of the woman warrior, and fulfills all the necessities of this role. What is her connection to the structured violence of the Amazonian society? In the context of Ferrarese culture in the age of Ercole d'Este, the revival of the Amazon imagery emerges as the product of a society obsessed with fears of illegitimacy. The figure of Marfisa, the most Amazonian of all the characters in the poem, is the fulcrum of the distinction, or lack thereof, between the Amazon and the warrior woman.

The Amazonian episode starts in canto XIX of the *Orlando furioso*, when Marfisa and her companions are forced to go ashore in a bay shaped like a half-moon, whose dangerous nature is immediately revealed. It is Alessandria, the land of the "femine omicide," whose ancient and cruel

custom,[20] that represents a modified version of the monosexual Amazonian society, is the subject of canto XX. The men who arrive in their land are either imprisoned or killed, and only the ones who can kill ten men and sleep with ten women are integrated with honor in this society. This is recounted to Marfisa and her companions by Guidone Selvaggio, who is the winner up to that point, must fight the newcomers in order to save his privilege and, more seriously, his life. He also explains the etiology of the law, which is divided in a number of phases: not only the foundation of the society has a double history (first with the adventures of Phalanthos and then with those of the Cretan women), but also the custom itself undergoes changes and modifications throughout the years.

Ariosto plays on the traits of classical Amazonian societies by inserting new elements: the basic Amazonian custom of excluding males from the state, for instance, acquires the added challenge in knightly and sexual prowess. Moreover, Ariosto achieves a number of effects (some comical, others more serious) by placing Marfisa, the woman warrior *par excellence* of his poem, within the specific context of a female ruled society. The centrality of Marfisa to this episode is part of a conscious narrative strategy, as confirmed by the addition, in 1532, of the new, mirroring episode of the Rocca di Tristano. At the Rocca, Bradamante is faced with a parallel gender dilemma to that of Marfisa among the "femine omicide". Like Marfisa, who decides to enter the Amazonian society as a man, Bradamante will choose to stay at the Rocca on the basis of her knightly prowess and not of her beauty. As she asserts in her debate with the lord of the castle, two identities are possible:

[20] The law, defined "antiqua"and "crudele", has the same marks of the other cruel laws of the poem, both those introduced in the 1532 edition (Olimpia, Marganorre, Rocca di Tristano) and those already present from the first edition ("L'aspra legge di Scozia" of IV, 59, 1).

> "Io ch'a difender questa causa toglio,
> dico: o più bella o men ch'io sia di lei,
> non venni come donna qui, né voglio
> che sian di donna ora i progressi miei."[21]

Echoing Marfisa, well aware that she could succeed as a woman in this newly found society,[22] Bradamante exploits the double nature of her persona, going beyond her future sister-in-law's inflexible binarism. Moreover, what in the case of Marfisa is evidently perceived as a lack (she would not be able to take on the second part of the challenge, that is to sleep with ten women) in the case of Bradamante will become excess, overabundance of talents (she could stay at the Rocca both as the most beautiful woman and as the most valiant knight).[23]

The historical and cultural contexts offer additional elements to explain the presence of an Amazonian society in the poem. Ariosto is not

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[21] L. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso secondo l'edizione del 1532 con le varianti delle edizioni del 1516 e del 1521*, cit., p. 1122 (XXXII, 102, 1-4).

[22] Cf. ibidem, p. 667: "S'io ci fossi per donna conosciuta, / so ch'avrei da le donne onore e pregio; / e volentieri io ci sarei tenuta, / e tra le prime forse del collegio" (XX, 78, 1-4).

[23] In both cases, the warrior women wave at their opponents the violent threat of the sword. Bradamante is ready to defend her position: "E s'alcuno di dir che non sia buono / e dritto il mio giudizio sarà ardito, sarò per sostenergli a suo piacere, / che'l mio sia vero, e falso il suo parere" (cf. ibidem, p. 1123, XXXII 106, 5-8). Marfisa could use her sword to cover up her perceived lack: "<E>t a Marfisa non mancava il core, / ben che mal atta alla seconda danza; / ma dove non l'aitasse la natura, / con la spada supplir stava sicura" (cf. ibidem, p. 627, XIX, 69, 4-8). The concept is further elaborated, with the same vocabulary of lack overcome by violence, in the octaves 73-74. Marfisa's companions fear she may not be able to participate in the duel ("non disegnavan di Marfisa forte, / stimando che trovar dovesse inciampo / ne la seconda giostra de la sera; / ch'ad averne vittoria abil non era"(cf. ibidem, p. 628, XIX, 73, 5-8), and she promises to be able to cut this "gordïano nodo" with her sword. For a convincing interpretation of this episode, of the image of the knot, and of Bradamante and Marfisa as central to Ariosto's compromise between epic and romance, see Ch. Bateman, *Amazonian Knots: Gender, Genre, and Ariosto's Women Warriors*, in "Modern Language Notes", 122, 2007, pp. 1-23. Ita MacCarthy reads this episode as anti-feminist mocking of Marfisa's lacking female anatomy: see I. MacCarthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry in Ariosto's "Orlando furioso"*, Leicester, Troubadour Publishing, 2007, pp. 73-94.

alone in representing Amazonian societies and the particular brand of structured violence they display. At the beginning of the sixteenth century in Italy, and in particular in the Northern courts, like Ferrara and Mantua, Amazons were a familiar presence. Not only did they figure prominently in a variety of texts, from epic chivalric poems to travel narratives, but also they were the main protagonists of texts devoted entirely to them, like Andrea Stagi's *Amazonida*. Whereas Boccaccio's *Teseida* stands as an isolated instance in its times, the descriptions of female-only societies became a staple in the popular epic production during the first years of its printed history, and an equally expected presence in travel accounts of the period.[24]

From the pervasive presence in the literary milieu of these decades, Amazonian societies seeped into the poetry of the *Furioso*. If the character of the single woman warrior fulfills a clear representational need, namely that of turning the adversary into a bride and securing 'her' reproductive potential in the most efficient and comforting way, Amazonian societies respond to a different, if connected, logic. Women organized in a society of their own clearly translate, in literary terms, the threat of female self-sufficiency, possibly a reason for anxiety in a society in which a small minority of women was steadily acquiring more power.[25] But there is

[24] It may be valuable to consider this factor from a pan-European comparative perspective, as does the volume *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, edited by J. R. Brink, M. C. Horowitz and A. P. Coudert, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1991. Of particular relevance to my argument the essay by A. Taufer, *The Only Good Amazon is a Converted Amazon: The Woman Warrior and Christianity in the Amadís Cycle*, ibidem, pp. 35-51.

[25] The female protagonists of Ferrarese history during Ariosto's times – Eleonora d'Aragona, Ercole's bride, their daughter Isabella, and Lucrezia Borgia, just to name a few – had an influence which would have been unthinkable fifty years earlier. Even though their power was dependent on that of the male figures they ultimately responded to, it was nonetheless very visible both within and without their courts. On this subject, in relation with the groundbreaking article by J. Kelly-Gadol, *Did Women Have a Renaissance?*, in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, edited by R.

more: a society entirely ruled by women represents on the page the fear of complete female control over reproduction and lineage.

The Amazonian theme is also used within a *querelle des femmes* of sorts, from the point of view of the defense of women. This is the case, for instance, of the book published in Venice on January 1503, by the otherwise unknown Andrea Stagi.[26] It is entitled *Amazonida*, and it is a poetic history of the classical Amazons in seven cantos. The prologue by the author explains the reason for the book, which is to be found in the oblivion that has, so far, obscured the deeds of these female warriors:

> "Et perche ve sia nota la cagione
> De li antiqui poeti e loro scusa
> Perche hanno scripto de donne amazone
> Si poca particella e si confusa
> Chi feriti damore a lui loppone
> Et chi de celebrar donne recusa
> Et Saphos charia pinta ogni partita
> Se scusa chel suo phaon lha impedita."[27]

Stagi uses the *topos* of the silence that has doomed women's deeds because of the envy of the male poets (with the twist of Sappho's culpable complicity), a *topos* that Ariosto himself will adopt in XXXVII, 23-24.[28] Time has obscured its fame, but in its day the *Amazonida* was a popular

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Bridenthal and C. Koonz, Boston, Houghton Mifflins, 1977, pp. 137-164, see D. Shemek, *In Continuous Expectation: Isabella d'Este's Epistolary Desire*, in *Phaeton's Children: the Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, cit., pp. 269-300.

[26] The press was that of Cristoforo de' Pensi de Mandello (d. fl. 1487-1503). It is worth noting that this is the same typographer who printed the 1498 edition of the *Ancroia*, preserved in Rome at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV A- 235).

[27] A. Stagi, *Amazonida*, Venezia, Cristoforo de' Pensi de Mandello, 1503, c. 1r (Proemio).

[28] See E. Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the "Orlando furioso"*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2012, pp. 134-136.

text.[29] What is even more relevant is to find a copy of this book in the inventory of the Ferrarese bookshop of Domenico Sivieri.[30] The *Amazonida* attests to an interest in Amazons, in Ferrara, in Ariosto's days.

Further exploration of the inventory of the Sivieri bookstore and in the libraries of the time reveals that the interest in Amazons that prompted Stagi to devote his work to them is in tune with a real passion for the deeds of warrior women of sorts, the legions of cruel warriors, half giantesses, half women, like Rovenza and Ancroia. The *Dama Rovenza* is one of the books a young Isabella d'Este asks her bookfinder in Venice, Giorgio Brugnolo, to acquire for her.[31] The *Ancroia* is present in the inventory,

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[29] The *Amazonida* was edited by Ernesto Spadolini (Ancona, Santoni, 1908) and this edition was the object of a review by Rodolfo Renier in "Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana", 54, 1909, pp. 220-223. See C. Dionisotti, *Fortuna del Boiardo nel Cinquecento*, in Id., *Boiardo e altri studi cavallereschi*, ed. G. Anceschi e A. Tissoni Benvenuti, Novara, Interlinea, 2003, pp. 143-161. That Stagi was part of a circle at least known to the Gonzagas of Mantua is demonstrated by references in his text, in particular to the poet Marco Cavallo. For these connections, see A. Luzio – R. Renier, *La coltura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, a cura di S. Albonico, Introduzione di G. Agosti, Milano, Sylvestre Bonnard, 2005, p. 239. I consulted two extant copies of the 1503 edition of the poem, the one preserved at the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome (RM0313) and the one owned by Harvard's Houghton Library (*IC.St136.503a), as well as the rare 1908 edition. As Carlo Dionisotti noted in 1970, few scholars have studied this poem, which also had a limited history in print: only one edition followed the one appeared in 1503, and its modern edition is rare. Fréderic Verrier mentions the text as an important contribution to the Amazonian literature of the Renaissance: see Fr. Verrier, *Le miroir des Amazones. Amazones, viragos et guerrières dans la littérature italienne des XVe et XVIe siècles*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 192-197.

[30] See A. Nuovo, *Il commercio librario a Ferrara tra XV e XVI secolo. La Bottega di Domenico Sivieri*, Firenze, Olschki, 1998, pp. 213-214; Id., *"I 'libri di battaglia': commercio e circolazione tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, in *Boiardo, Ariosto e i libri di battaglia*, Atti del Convegno (Scandiano – Reggio Emilia – Bologna, 3-6 ottobre 2005), a cura di A. Canova e P. Vecchi Galli, Novara, Interlinea, 2007, p. 348.

[31] The letter to Giorgio Brognolo, dated September 24, 1491, is quoted in A. Luzio - R. Renier, *La coltura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, cit., p. 8. The *princeps* of the *Dama Rovenza* (Venice, Luca di Domenico, ca. 1482) is preserved at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome (Inc. Ross. 1350), and this is the copy I consulted. For a review of the history of the *Rovenza* in print, see N. Harris, *A Mysterious UFO in the Venetian "Dama Rovenza" [c.1482]*, in "Gutenberg-Jahrbuch", 78, 2003, pp. 22-30. On the text, see A. Pasqualino, *Dama Rovenza dal*

along with the *Aspromonte*, which narrated the deeds of Galiziella.[32] One of the most important chivalric poems of the fifteenth century, the *Libro della regina Ancroia* marks an explicit connection between the chivalric world and the amazonian theme.[33] The rather long and discursive *explicit* of the book (in the 1479 edition) underlines its connections with the Amazonian tradition, boasting it as a selling point:

"Il libro di lanchroia qui finisse impresso ne la magnifica citta de vinesia ne glanni dil signore 1479 / ali giorni .28. di setembre per magistro philipo de piero miser johanne mozenico felicissimo du ce im / perante et non vi para lectore maraviglia di combatere terribile di questa donna. Anchora in / molte altre istorie si legge le donne havere combatuto come panchasilea:orthia:lampedo; con // tra de le quale fu mandato Hercule tanto era il furore loro da la gente temuto. Simile camilla la / quale il poeta domanda honore de italia. Non dubitate di acomprare questo libro peche eglie/ correcto con ogni bona et perfecta diligentia et de le lhistoria di carlo magno cum glialtri suoi / paladini contiene li qual furono ne gli anni del signor octocento et quindese et mori in aquis. / grani havendo liberato italia dal furore de longobardi si che sotto varie fictione qui parte de li / soi gesti egregiamente si veghano."[34]

The advertising strategy of the press clearly plays on the connection between the formidable queen Ancroia and the Amazons of the past,

martello e la leggenda di Rinaldo da Montalbano, in *I cantari, Struttura e tradizione, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Montreal, 19-20 marzo 1981*, a cura di M. Picone e M. Bendinelli Predelli, Firenze, Olschki, 1984, pp. 177-198.

[32] See A. Nuovo, *Il commercio librario a Ferrara tra XV e XVI secolo. La Bottega di Domenico Sivieri*, cit., pp. 14-15; Id., *"I 'libri di battaglia': commercio e circolazione tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, cit., p. 353.

[33] The 1479 edition (from the types of Filippo de' Petri) is the first known edition of the poem. It is preserved at the Pierpoint Morgan Library in New York, and this is the copy I consulted (PML 22108). Many other editions followed, including (just to mention the extant incunabula) Venice 1482, Venice 1485, Venice 1494, Venice 1498 (the one printed by the same typographer who printed the *Amazonida*, Cristoforo de' Pensi), and Venice 1499. On the *Ancroia*, see A. Montanari, *Il "Libro de l'Ancroia"*, in "Libri & Documenti", XVIII, 1993, pp. 1-15 (which provides interesting parallels with Boiardo's and Ariosto's poems as well as an excellent summary of the long poem); Ead., *Il "Libro de l'Ancroia" e il Boiardo*, in "Rivista di letteratura italiana", 13, 1995, pp. 225-243. For the intertextual relations between the *Ancroia* and the *Danese*, as well as a great wealth of information on these poems, see M. Villoresi. *La fabbrica dei cavalieri, cantari, poemi, romanzi in prosa fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Roma, Salerno, 2005.

[34] *Libro de la regina Ancroia*, Venezia, Filippo de' Petri, 1479, c. 243v.

bridging the gap between classical myth and popular romance fiction.

In the epic-chivalric tradition of the fifteenth century, both in prose and in verse, the staging of some of the action in the legendary kingdom of the Amazons becomes a commonplace. Such is the case for the *Morgante*, in which Rinaldo and his companions find themselves in the land of Saliscaglia, inhabited by ugly and hairy women who fight and wear armor like the legendary creatures of the classical myth.[35] Similarly, the long prose text *Fortunato*, devoted to the adventures of the eponymous hero, includes an episode set in the reign of the Amazons:

" […] arrivarono nel regno dell'amanzone dove regniavano le donne, le quali erano valentissime in battaglia et era in quel tempo una Reina regniante chiamata Spinalia la quale era in sull'età d'anni XVIII e molto era bellissima e era regina e valentissima in arme quanto femina e /o homo che arme portasse e faceva guardare li passi fuori dalla terra suoi; né alcuno vi potea passare per quello regno che allei non si appresentasse e il più delle volte rubava e amazzava i viandanti purche avesseno avuto robba alcuna che li fusse piaciuta."[36]

This kingdom possesses two elements of the classical Amazonian tale: the young and beautiful queen and the violent defense of the borders from intruders. When Fortunato is faced with Spinalia's army, his reaction is derision:

" […] con parole comincio a svillaneggiarle dicendo che farebbeno il meglio dandare affilare e andare affare laltre cose femminili e non volere cosi vituperare e

[35] Cf. L. Pulci, *Il Morgante*, a cura di G. Fatini, Torino, U.T.E.T, 1968, vol. II, pp. 190-191 (XX, 158, 5-8): "Come quelle Amazzone veston maglia, / son per natura coperte di vello, / pilose, setolute, strane e brutte, / ma molto fiere per combatter tutte". Pulci, notoriously ironic on the subject of the warrior woman – suffice it to think of the treatment he reserves to Merediana or Chiarella in battle – subjects his Amazons to male rule: they are the army of the evil lord Arpalista. On the episode in the *Morgante* (and its predecessor, the *Orlando*) as a source for the *Furioso* see P. Rajna, *Le fonti dell'"Orlando furioso"*, cit., p. 297. Rajna himself argues that the scene is too commonplace in these texts to be able to trace a direct filiation.

[36] *Fortunato*, MS. Panciatichiano 36, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, c. 240r.

lonorate armi e molte altre villanie loro fortunato disse alle ditte damigielle."[37]

Not just poets and *canterini*, but also the travelers who wrote of the new worlds' discoveries had a soft spot for Amazons.

In this cultural atmosphere, Boccaccio's *Teseida* played an important role as a model for Amazonian stories. In particular the first book, with the wedding of Hyppolita and Theseus, provided a standard reference for the construction of Amazonian figures in the Italian Renaissance.[38] In Ferrara, the commentary to the *Teseida* authored by Pier Andrea de' Bassi was dedicated to Niccolò III, and it opens with a genealogy culminating with the Este ruler, an element that further demonstrates the strong connections between Amazonian themes and genealogical concerns.[39]

In the genealogy of the main characters of the *Orlando furioso*, the Amazonian past is strongly present. In particular, Ruggiero and Marfisa are of Amazonian descent, since their mother Galiziella is portrayed as an Amazon in the tradition. The same is true, even though in a different genealogical sphere, purely literary, for Bradamante, who is modeled for some traits on Galaciella, the protagonist of the *Aspromonte* tradition.[40] Galiziella's Amazonian status is clear in the Laurentian manuscript that preserves the prose account conventionally titled *Aquilante e Formosa*:

[37] Ibidem, c. 240v.

[38] On Boccaccio's epic poem and its reception, see J. Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic in the Age of Humanism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 107-126. On its portrayal of the Amazon, see C. Freccero, *From Amazon to Court Lady: Generic Hybridization in Boccaccio's "Teseida"*, in "Comparative Literature Studies", 32, 1995, pp. 226-243.

[39] I am grateful to Dennis Looney for bringing this element to my attention. On Pier Andrea de' Bassi's *Commentary*, published for the first time in 1475 under Ercole's rule, see C. Montagnani, *"Andando con lor dame in aventura". Percorsi estensi*, Galatina, Congedo, 2004, pp. 3-49.

[40] See E. Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the "Orlando furioso"*, cit., pp. 33-43.

" […] ein questa andata deste Agholante arrivo cholui una sua figluola detta ghaliziella danni sedici chera molto bella e avea inmodo imparato affare fatti darme chela sera allenata cholle donne damazone neregno feminoro e nel suo tempo non trovo chavaliere che labatesse da chavallo senno ricieri i quale innunabattaglia labatte e lei sarende a lui e batezossi e fu suo donna e ingravido di ricieri i duo figluoli."[41]

In this succinct account, all the traits of Galiziella's life are highlighted. In both the *Cantari d'Aspramonte* and in Andrea da Barberino's *Aspromonte*, Galaciella is a bastard daughter of Agolante, and she comes from the Kingdom of Feminoro, reign of the Amazons.[42] Not only the presence of Amazonian societies is pervasive, but also the theme of bastardy seems inextricably linked with the figure of the Amazon. In the epic-chivalric tradition, the rule of the Amazons is clearly connected with fears loss of control over reproduction and threats of illegitimacy.

These same perceived threats and the anxiety they induce seem to be the reason behind the popularity of Amazons in the very unexpected context of weddings. Wedding chests, the Renaissance artifacts that accompanied new couples of a certain social standing in the beginning of their married lives, have a number of set themes, including violent ones. It is not uncommon for the wedding chest, or *cassone*, to display conflictual moments of male-female relations, to the point of extreme violence: the classical Rape of the Sabines, and the Boccaccian stories of Griselda and Nastagio degli Onesti are examples of this tendency. Experts generally explain the violent subjects as cautionary tales for the new brides.[43] The

[41] MS. Med. Pal. 101, Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, vol. 2, c. 2v. On this text see P. Rajna, *Le fonti dell'"Orlando furioso"*, cit., pp. 513-517 and J. Vitullo, *The Chivalric Epic in Medieval Italy*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2000, pp. 67-73.

[42] See E. Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the "Orlando furioso"*, cit., p. 35.

[43] On the *cassoni*, recently the object of monographic studies, see G. Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni. Masterpieces of Early Italian Art: Painted Marriage Chests 1400-1550*, London, Art Books International, 1997; C. Baskins, *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, Boston, Gutenberg Periscope Press,

common presence of Amazons in these artifacts, however, seems to complicate this explanation, and has warranted further elaborations. Cristelle Baskins, in particular, has suggested that the Amazonian imagery "provided models for filial transitions from natal to conjugal families, whether voluntary or coerced".[44] Indeed, Amazons were not just a cautionary tale, but fostered a reflection on the passage of the woman from one lineage to the other. The pervasive presence of Amazons in the decorations of wedding chests is further evidence of the connection between the Amazonian theme and the anxiety over generation and succession in the late medieval and early modern period.

3. *The Foundation of Alessandria in the "Orlando furioso"*

The foundation of Alessandria in the *Furioso* explicitly connects the theme of female rule with an incontrollable anxiety over legitimacy, embodied by the errant youths that frame the narrative of Amazonian foundation. The identity of the narrator of the birth of this state is a premonition of the theme to come. He is, in fact, none other than Guidone Selvaggio, who, in the popular chivalric tradition preceding Boiardo and Ariosto, is the illegitimate son of Rinaldo. Amone's most famous son is, in fact, the protagonist of a number of poems that feature his wanderings and his adventures far from Charlemagne's court, where he seduced princesses and ladies and generated a few bastard sons.[45] Guidone's feats are the

2008; C. Campbell, *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence. The Courtauld Wedding Chests*, London, The Courtauld Gallery, 2009.

[44] Cf. C. Baskins, *'Cassone' Painting, Humanism and Gender in Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 49. On chests featuring Amazons, especially derived from Boccaccio's *Teseida*, see ibidem, pp. 26-49.

[45] The adventures of Rinaldo are the most interesting thread in the early epic-chivalric tradition of Italy, as well as one of the most abundant: Rajna pointed to this corpus as one of the keys to the understanding of the Italian epic. See E. Melli, *Nella*

subject of a poem we have already had occasion to mention, the *Ancroia*, devoted to the deeds of the formidable eponymous queen. In the first canto of the poem Rinaldo, out of the usual hostility against Charlemagne, travels to the Holy Land. There, he falls in love with Solizano's wife, Costanza and, as he leaves, he asks the lady to send him his daughter or son, once he or she grows up. After the death of Solizano, a son is born, Guidone, who will reach puberty, discover the truth, and embark on a trip to find his father, with the veiled aim of converting him to Islam.[46] During the same years of publication and early fame of the *Furioso*, other poems feature the adventures of Guidone, this time giving the character the honor of the title: in 1523, in Padua, Giovanni Antonio Remondini publishes Giovan Battista Dragoncino's poem *Innamoramento di Guidon Selvaggio*, and only a few years later, in 1535, Antonio Legname's *Guidon Selvaggio* sees the light.[47] In all these texts, both preceding and contemporary to the *Furioso*, Guidone is an illegitimate son who travels to the West in search of his father, not only eager for recognition but also bearing the knowledge of an alternate lineage.

In the *Furioso*, the obsessive attention to blood and lineage is the first element of Guidone's self-presentation. As he introduces himself to Marfisa and her companions, he withdraws his name for almost three octaves,[48] and draws attention instead to his important lineage ("Io credo

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selva dei "Rinaldi": poemetti su Rinaldo da Montalbano in antiche edizioni a stampa, in "Studi e Problemi di Critica Testuale", XVI, 1978, pp. 193-215; A. Morosi, *Breve storia della "Storia di Rinaldo"*, in "Interpres", 1, 1978, pp. 285-293; M. Sherberg, *Rinaldo. Character and Intertext in Ariosto and Tasso*, cit.

[46] On the fact that Ariosto turns Guidone from Rinaldo's son into his brother, see P. Rajna, *Le fonti dell'"Orlando furioso"*, cit., p. 306 and the commentary by Emilio Bigi, in L. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, a cura di E. Bigi, Milano, Rusconi, 1982, p. 846.

[47] In both cases, in keeping with the tradition, Guidone is Rinaldo's son, not his half-brother.

[48] This is possibly another play with the tradition of the *poemi cavallereschi*. In many texts, such as the *Ancroia*, the name of the knight is revealed only after long

che ciascun di vui / abbia de la mia stirpe il nome in pronto").[49] Guidone uses the language of generation to proclaim his noble birth, arguing that his mother made him out of the noble blood of the House of Chiaramonte:

> "Di questo sangue, dove ne l'Eusino
> l'Istro ne vien con otto corna o diece,
> al duca Amone, il qual già peregrino
> vi capitò, la madre mia mi fece."[50]

In an imitative game that combines the classical myth and the more recent popular chivalric tradition, the beginning of the story Guidone tells to Marfisa and her companions on the foundation of Alessandria echoes his own. Illegitimate youths are the first root of the social and dynastic disorder that will bring about the foundation of the Amazonian state. Once the duel between Marfisa and Guidone has come to a standstill, Marfisa asks what is the reason for the scarcity of men in the land, and Guidone proceeds to explain the reason of the peculiar situation of Alessandria. The story he tells is a carefully woven foundational account that combines classical sources and medieval rewritings, in particular Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*.

The foundational tale has four steps: the Greeks marginalize the bastard sons they find upon their return after the Trojan War; the wayward youths, guided by Phalanthos, pillage and rob the coasts until they arrive in Crete, where they are hired as military; after the war, they decide to leave and are followed by the Cretan women whom they abandon on the shores of the future Alessandria; the abandoned women, following Oronthea's

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preambles. While this can be said of other genres as well, the character of Guidone seems to draw a direct connection with the *poemi cavallereschi*.

[49] Cf. L. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso secondo l'edizione del 1532 con le varianti delle edizioni del 1516 e del 1521*, cit., p. 642 (XX, 5, 3-4).

[50] Ibidem, p. 643 (XX, 6, 3-6).

lead, decide to stay and create a female society that takes its vengeance on any men who comes near the shore.

Critics have interpreted this narrative as an original combination of episodes from Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* and Strabo's *Geographica.* In the *Argonautica*, the Lemnian women, betrayed by their husbands, murder them.[51] The Latin rewriting by Valerius Flaccus slightly modifies the story, blaming Fame for having made the women jealous.[52] Apollonius Rhodius' text circulated widely in Italy in the late fifteenth century, albeit probably only in Greek. Yet, its diffusion is attested by the presence of an *incunabulum* printed in Florence by the Venetian Laurentius de Alopa (1496), and it is not surprising to find precisely this text in the Ferrarese library of Domenico Sivieri.[53] Ariosto refers directly to the episode of the women from Lemnos in canto XXXVII, while describing Ruggiero's fears as he enters the kingdom of evil Marganorre.[54] Strabo's account includes the generation of the bastard sons of the Lacedemons during the Trojan War, called Parthenie, and the name of their leader, Phalanthos. It also accounts for an attempted revolt of the Parthenie, and for the decision to send them off to colonize a new territory (hence the foundation of Tarentum). The text also establishes a connection with the Cretans, who would be the population already settled in Sicily welcoming the newcomers.[55]

Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* provides a much stronger model

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[51] See Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, I, 607.

[52] See Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*, II, 107-134.

[53] See A. Nuovo, *Il commercio librario a Ferrara tra XV e XVI secolo. La Bottega di Domenico Sivieri*, cit., p. 183.

[54] *OF* XXXVII, 36. On this specific passage, see P. J. Benson, *A Defense of the Excellence of Bradamante*, cit., pp. 143-144 and C. P. Brand, *Ludovico Ariosto: A Preface to the "Orlando furioso"*, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh Press, 1974, pp. 117-120.

[55] See Strabo, *Geographica*, VI, C, 278-279.

for the episode, one that already combines some of the elements of the different classical sources. It tells a slightly different story, the wayward youths are the Minyans: "Menie igitur fuere ex Iasonis atque Argonautarum sociis non minime nobilitatis splendidissime iuvenes".[56] After the end of the expedition, they settled in Sparta, where they were welcomed and integrated, achieving visibility and marrying the finest Spartan women. Their greed for power induced them to stage a coup, after which they were imprisoned and sentenced to death. At this point the tale of missed integration of a group of wayward youths acquired the element of the loyal wives that will be adopted by Ariosto. The wives of the Minyans substitute themselves to their husbands with a stratagem and save them from death.

Three basic plots are conflated in Ariosto's story: the tale of the wayward youths who threaten a state and are sent away, to found a new one (Phalanthos who founds Tarentum with his group, according to Strabo's *Geographica*); Boccaccio's tale of the Minyan women, who show loyalty to their husbands while rebelling against their fathers, translated by Ariosto into the decision of the Cretese women to leave with the youths; and finally, the tale of the women from Lemnos, who, in the *Argonautica* tradition also present in Boccaccio,[57] kill all their men except for one and found a female only society. An added element is that of the seduction and abandonment of a group of women, which may or may not be attached to either of the two plots (both Phalanthos and the Lemnos husbands can be depicted as traitors). What these three narratives have in common is the foundation of a new state.

The pre-text of Alessandria's foundation provides a new element as the root of the Amazonian society: the threat of a herd of illegitimate

[56] Cf. G. Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus*, a cura di V. Zaccaria, Milano, Mondadori, 1967, p. 130 (XXXI, 3).

[57] See ibidem, pp. 80-84 (XVI, 1-11).

offspring. The two elements (wayward men and Amazonian society) could be connected because of their proximity in the narrations of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*. The deeds of queen Penthesilea, the founder of the Amazonian state, are preceded by the tale of the anonymous wives of the Minyans, which is clearly a precedent for the narration of Phalanthos' adventures. Moreover, the two elements are already connected in one of the Amazonian narratives of the *De claris mulieribus*, none other than the sections on Marpesia and Lampedo, the two Amazonian queens who are the subject of chapters XI and XII.

Ariosto seems to be using the model of the *De claris mulieribus* in a pervasive way: on the one hand, he re-etymologizes Marfisa as a descendant of Marpesia, making her the protagonist of the Amazonian episode told by Boccaccio in the chapter devoted to her; he takes the connection between the wayward men and the Amazonian society present in the Marpesia chapter and revitalizes them through the narrative of the wives of the Minyans. The intertext seems to be globally present in the text, and the sequences derived from it are linked. In other words, the model is so powerfully present in the destination text (and to the author's mind), that it 'sticks' to it, leaving textual particles, as it were, that echo each other throughout.[58]

The genesis of this etiological narrative is fairly clear, thanks to the discovery of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* as a comprehensive model for the episode. What remains to be explained is the relevance of such a complex story for Ariosto's poem and its intended audience. This causal nexus between the wayward bastards and the Amazonian foundation creates in the canto a particular sense of circularity and forced repetition. In this obsessive repetition of exclusions and failed integrations, the focus of

[58] See n. 13.

the canto seems to be on the issue of the control of legitimacy.

The Amazonian state of Alessandria presents both the threat (total loss of control of the males over their offspring and generative power) and the solution (violent control over generative power).[59] This double movement of fear and desire seems particularly relevant to the self-representation and propaganda of a ruling dynasty, which bases on legitimacy the right to succession. The Este, in particular, had a vexed relationship with legitimacy. Since the twelfth century they had acquired and maintained power despite a tainted fame of bastardy. The ruler who had played the most important role in the steady acquisition of power on the family's part, Niccolò III, is the emblematic example of this dynastic negligence. Not one, but two of his many bastard children succeeded their natural father into power. Lionello and Borso, both children of Stella de' Tolomei, ruled over Ferrara and Modena from 1441 to 1471, despite their less than proper place in the family line. This imperfect status is one of the causes for concern and outright anxiety over purity of blood and family trees the writers and historiographers of the family display in their texts.[60]

Ariosto writes in a time of restored legitimacy, under the rules of Ercole (the legitimate son of Niccolò III, Duke from 1471 to 1505) and Alfonso (1505-1534). These times were marked by a heightened sense of

[59] For Amazonian origins as necessarily "written out" of history, see P. Geary, *Women at the Beginning. Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 26-42. For the Amazonian theme in Tasso, see W. Stephens, *Saint Paul among the Amazons: Gender and Authority in "Gerusalemme liberata"*, in *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, edited by W. Stephens and K. Brownlee, Hanover (N. H.), University Press of New England, 1989, pp. 169–200.

[60] See D. Looney, *Ferrarese Studies: Tracking the Rise and Fall of an Urban Lordship in the Renaissance*, in *Phaeton's Children: The Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, cit., pp. 16-17.

dynastic propriety achieved through the control of the paternal bloodline.[61] The myth of Phaeton itself, so central to the courtly culture of Ferrara, may be the emblem of a perceived anxiety over legitimate succession and paternity.[62] Many texts of the time, including the *Furioso*, may provide insight into this deep-seated social fear. It is the case, however, that the clearest forms of this representation are not to be found in the openly dynastic accounts, but rather in the veiled ones. The *Furioso*'s Amazonian state is such an episode, with its repeated preoccupation with generative powers and the necessity of controlling them.

[61] See J. F. Bestor, *Marriage and Succession in the House of Este: A Literary Perspective*, cit., p. 52.

[62] See D. Looney, *Ferrarese Studies: Tracking the Rise and Fall of an Urban Lordship in the Renaissance*, cit., p. 2: "Ariosto's allusion to the myth may even reflect a local concern of the Ferrarese court with the issues of paternity and the legitimacy of succession among the members of the ruling family".