

MIDDLE AGES & RENAISSANCE

Ludovico Ariosto. *Orlando furioso: secondo la princeps del 1516*. Ed. Marco Dorigatti. Con la collaborazione di Gerarda Stimato. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2006. Pp. clxxxii + 1072.

Until now anyone who wanted to read the first edition of the *Orlando furioso* would have had to travel to a city housing one of the twelve extant copies. Although there had been two previous efforts to render Ariosto's original poem accessible to a wider readership, these editions did not treat it as autonomous in its own right. Between 1909 and 1913, Filippo Ermini edited the three-volume *Orlando Furioso di Ludovico Ariosto secondo le stampe del 1516, 1521, 1532 rivedute dall'Autore* for the Società Filologica Romana. Printed in only 300 copies, the first two volumes provide the stanzas from the 1516 and 1521 editions side-by-side on the same page, while the final volume is devoted to the third edition. In 1960, Santorre Debenedetti and Cesare Segre edited the *Orlando Furioso secondo l'edizione del 1532 con le varianti delle edizioni del 1516 e del 1521*. As the title indicates, they privileged the 1532 text even more, simply including variants from 1516 and 1521 in footnotes.

Neither of these endeavors, moreover, presents readers with a reliable version of Ariosto's original poem. Marco Dorigatti has ascertained that the former is based primarily on the copy at Dresden with some modifications, while the 1960 edition is based in turn on Ermini's text checked against the Ferrarese *princeps*. Indeed, as it turns out, none of the extant copies read alone could be said to constitute the original *Furioso*. Having examined each of the exemplars in Italy (4), France (2), England (2), the United States (2), Germany (1), and Ireland (1), Dorigatti has found that the *testimonium unicum* is not uniform. Discrepancies among the various texts attest to Ariosto's active participation during the poem's printing since many corrections could only have been undertaken by the author. While this makes the publication history of the first edition more interesting, it hugely complicates the task of arriving at a definitive version.

In order to achieve this goal, in 1999 Dorigatti began to transcribe the 528 pages of the Ferrarese *princeps*, which then became the copy-text that was checked against the eleven other copies dispersed in six countries. Initially working alone, and subsequently with an assistant and a small group, he compared every letter of all twelve extant copies and uncovered 111 internal variants. The end result is a critical edition that not only renders the 1516 poem independent of later editions, but also provides an "ideal text" reconstructed deductively on the basis of all the variants (xlii). It is thus with reason that Gianni Venturi, director of Ferrara's Istituto di Studi Rinascimentali, refers to Dorigatti as the "eroe dell'impresa" and considers their sponsorship of this project "la più ambiziosa meta che l'Istituto si è posto" (v).

This impressive volume, gilt-edged and bound in maroon cloth with golden-tooled lettering, is a pleasure to behold. The color plate with the poem's initial page, reproduced from the dedication copy (now in Paris) that Ariosto sent to the French king François I, is an added treat. Research shows that its illumination matches the style in vogue in the Estense court in the late fifteenth century. The other illustration, besides the original publisher's logo from the frontispiece, is that of the enigmatic xylograph of bees fleeing fire with the inscription "PRO BONO MALUM." In addition, the poem itself is presented in an enticing format with four to five stanzas in a single column per page.

The importance of this monumental edition, however, is clearly much more than historical and aesthetic. Dorigatti states: "Una delle idee cardini che, in questo processo di riesamina, sono emerse e che si possono annoverare tra le acquisizioni più mature della critica ariostesca riguarda proprio l'autonomia di questo particolare *Orlando*: il fatto, cioè, che non si tratta di versione o redazione che prelude ad altro, ma di opera in sé conclusa, espressamente licenziata dall'autore e dotata di un proprio, singolarissimo profilo linguistico e letterario" (xxxi). Indeed, this publication comes at a time in which Ariosto criticism has increasingly recognized the autonomy of the 1516 text; moreover, it opens up new possibilities for research and teaching, especially in the context of graduate courses. In my own case, for example, even though in previous courses on Ariosto I regularly postponed reading the episodes added in 1532 until the completion of the rest of the poem, this past semester Dorigatti's volume made it easier for students to take into account divergences between editions both in class and while preparing their research papers.

The introductory and supporting material is rich and extensive (xxi-clxxx), providing a wealth of information about the circumstances of the poem's printing and the circulation of the extant copies (the history of the exemplars now located in France and the United States was particularly fascinating). Although much of the information on the variants is geared to specialists, some points are of more general interest. Dorigatti notes, for example, that the 1516 *Furioso* is the first work published by Ariosto since the two comedies printed in 1509 were unauthorized (xxi-xxii), and that it is the only one out of the three editions to be based entirely on an autograph manuscript (xxii).

In sum, Dorigatti's new edition greatly facilitates use of the 1516 poem in critical studies and encourages the rest of us to read the *Furioso* again, since the experience will also be that of discovering this particular version for the first time. The author concludes his introduction by reflecting precisely on how one might proceed: "Forse il modo più sicuro è proprio quello di accostarsi come ci si accosta ad un libro fresco di stampa e, partendo da 'Di donne e cavallier li antiqui amori', lasciarsi trasportare fino ad arrivare 'Alle squalide ripe d'Acheronte': a tutto il resto penserà l'Ariosto" (xxxviii).

Jo Ann Cavallo, *Columbia University*