

Romance and Recovery in *Orlando furioso*: The Night Raid, the Homicidal Women, and the Pattern of Romance

LEONARD NALENCZ

College of Mount Saint Vincent

At the end of Homer's *Iliad*, Andromache mourns the death of her husband Hector and tells her son Astyanax that just two possible futures await him: enslavement or death.¹ Greek poetry and tragedy after Homer recount only the latter fate, and Astyanax's death is depicted "on temple pediments and painted vases."² Vergil and Ovid continue the Greek tradition.³ In book 3 of the *Aeneid*, Andromache is briefly reunited with Aeneas and his son Ascanius; she offers Ascanius golden robes and says to him: "Take them. The last gifts of your own people. You are the only image of my Astyanax that's left. His eyes, his hands, his features, so like yours—he would be growing up now, just your age."⁴

There is a suggestion of Astyanax's survival in the physical resemblance to Ascanius his mother notes—"His eyes, his hands, his features, so like yours"—but this is figurative: only the ghost of her son is left in his young kinsman's bearing and appearance. In all the legends of antiquity, Astyanax dies.

In the third book of the *Orlando innamorato* (1494), Matteo Maria Boiardo draws on a medieval tradition according to which Astyanax survives. In Boiardo's version of the story, Astyanax is saved by his resourceful and self-sacrificing mother, who snatches another young boy up as a decoy

1. Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1990), 24.862–68.

2. Bernard Knox, introduction to *ibid.*, 37. Euripides's *Andromache* and *Trojan Women* are frequently cited sources for the death of Astyanax at Troy. Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), begins with a discussion of Racine's *Andromaque* (1667), another story in which Astyanax survives, in that case because his mother consents to marry the marauding Greek, Pyrrhus.

3. Ovid recounts the death of Astyanax, thrown from the walls of Troy, in *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 13.413–17.

4. Vergil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006), 3.488–91.

and runs away with him in her arms until both she and that child are caught and killed by the Greeks.⁵ Like Boiardo, Ludovico Ariosto claims to be tracing the lineage of the Este rulers of Ferrara from Hector of Troy; for the sake of their patrons, both poets need to have Astyanax survive.⁶ In canto 36 of the *Orlando furioso* (1516, 1521, 1532), Ruggiero tells his twin sister Marfisa the story of Astyanax's survival:

Ruggiero incominciò, che da' Troiani
per la linea d'Ettore erano scesi;
che poi che Astianatte de le mani
campò d'Ulisse e da li aguati tesi,
avendo un de' fanciulli coetani
per lui lasciato, uscì di quei paesi;
e dopo un lungo errar per la marina,
venne in Sicilia e dominò Messina.
(36.70)⁷

[Ruggiero began, saying that they were descended from the Trojans through the lineage of Hector; because after Astyanax escaped from the hands of Odysseus and his covert ambushes, and one of the boys of his age was left behind in his place, Astyanax departed those lands; and after a long time as a sailor, he came to Sicily, and became lord of Messina.]

The recovery of Astyanax provides a genealogical connection between classical antiquity and sixteenth-century Ferrara. It is not—significantly—a rebirth: it is a story of unlikely survival. Ariosto's character Astyanax establishes a type within the *Furioso*: the doomed youth who survives with the help of a maternal caretaker. In the night raid (cantos 18–19), the character

5. "La ritrovarno col fanciullo in braccio / E a l'uno e a l'altro dier di morte spaccio" (They found her with the baby in her arms / and they swiftly dealt death to each one) (Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando innamorato*, ed. Aldo Scaglione [Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1966], 3.5.20). All English translations are my own unless otherwise noted. For the tradition of Astyanax's survival, see *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. Bernard S. Bachrach (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1973).

6. There are many studies of the dynastic theme in the *Furioso*. In *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Medieval Imagination in the "Orlando furioso"* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), Eleanora Stoppino considers the "genealogical systems—political dynasty, intertextuality, and gender" in the *Furioso* (2). Albert Ascoli considers genealogy in the *Furioso* in *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 151, 208–9, 213. See also Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); and Marco Dorigatti, "Rugiero and the Dynastic Theme," in *Italy in Crisis: 1494*, ed. Jane Everson and Diego Zancani (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 92–128.

7. All references are to Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1995). My English translations from the *Furioso* were done in consultation with Guido Waldman, trans., *Orlando furioso* (Oxford University Press, 1974).

Medoro languishes near death, but is revived by a caretaker; in the episode of the homicidal women (cantos 19–20), Guidone Selvaggio⁸ is the heir of a lineage of youthful heroes who face certain death, but survive. These characters represent, in many ways, the genre of romance: they are beautiful, fortunate young men, associated with magic and the East. The interlace of these episodes suggests that the genre of romance in the *Furioso* functions as a strategy for continuity and survival, in the mode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁹

Ultimately this essay argues for a reconsideration of the critical consensus about epic and romance modes and their interrelation in *Orlando furioso*. Critics of romance in the *Furioso* have primarily seen the genre as a narrative exploration of wandering/error (Parker, Donato); or as the space of narrative digression specifically opposed to the epic genre's teleological impulse to death/closure (Quint, Ascoli, Shemek).¹⁰ Other critical readings have complicated or refined the relationship between the romance and epic aspects of hybrid poems like the *Furioso*, testifying to what Barbara Fuchs calls the "incredible inventiveness with regard to genre" of early modern literature.¹¹ J. Chimène Bateman reads the figures of Bradamante and Marfisa as embodying romance and epic conventions, respectively, but she sees an unresolved complexity in Ariosto's use of these characters. The romance figure, Bradamante, "represents and subverts

8. Italian usage is to write "Guidone" when the first name alone is used, and "Guidon Selvaggio" for the full name; I have standardized the use of the name as Guidone throughout this essay.

9. Barbara Fuchs argues for an "understanding of romance as a strategy" in *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

10. See Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton University Press, 1979); Eugenio Donato, "Per Selve e Boscherecci Labirinti: Desire and Narrative Structure in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 33–62; David Quint, "The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poem," *Modern Language Notes* 94, no. 1 (January 1979): 77–91, and "Palaces of Enchantment: the 1516 *Furioso*," *Modern Language Notes* 133, no. 1 (January 2018): 9–31; Albert Russell Ascoli, "Ariosto and the 'Fier Pastor': Form and History in *Orlando furioso*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 487–52; and Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 123. Additionally, in *Il "Furioso" fra epico e romanzo* (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1990), Sergio Zatti analyzes the interplay of epic and romance episodes in the *Furioso*, including the near-endless, self-reflexive wandering of the narrator in the poem. James Nohrnberg describes the structure of the *Furioso* as "a departure from, and a return to, epic," where the departures are the romance episodes of wandering and the adventure quest (*Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* [Princeton University Press, 1976], 17).

11. Barbara Fuchs, "Forms of Engagement," *Modern Language Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2006): 2. See also Daniel Javitch, "The Grafting of Vergilian Epic in *Orlando furioso*," in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 56–76, and "Reconsidering the Last Part of *Orlando furioso*: Romance to the Bitter End," *Modern Language Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (December 2010): 385–405.

the plots of romance,” and although Marfisa is “a representative epic figure” in the *Furioso*, she “undermines the epic norm.”¹² The romance genre in the *Furioso* has recently been theorized as a space for experimentation with the limits of speech and thought: Heather James argues, “The capacity to explore human things without organizing them belongs to Ovid and the romance genre.”¹³ In this essay I consider the ways in which romance functions as a strategy to recover characters and stories from the limits of epic expectation. The critical privileging of closure in interpretations of the *Furioso* fails to recognize the dogged impulse to survival that characterizes both the romance mode and the early modern project of humanism, which recovers texts that are damaged and languishing, and nurses them back into literary life.

THE NIGHT RAID

The night raid is a peripheral set piece in the epic tradition. In book 10 of Homer’s *Iliad*, Odysseus and Diomedes put on animal skins and set out together in the dark to slaughter Trojan men in their sleep, lie to the captive Dolon, and then kill him: it is a jarringly brutal moment when, just as Dolon starts to reach up in a gesture of supplication to grasp his captor’s beard, Diomedes suddenly slashes his throat. The *Iliad*’s night raid is a tightly circumscribed narrative realm in which the laws of accepted behavior are suspended, and where questions of morality (betraying a captive, killing the defenseless) are approached more openly than elsewhere in the poem. Does this episode belong to the original tale? Even in antiquity it was read with a raised eyebrow.¹⁴

The night raid in Vergil’s *Aeneid* is slightly more integrated into the plot of the poem. As in the *Iliad*, the laws of daylight confrontation are suspended: two Trojan soldiers leave their camp to get a message to Aeneas, and take advantage of darkness to slaughter the enemy Rutulians in their sleep. Nisus (in the skin of a lion) and Euryalus are models of piety and devotion to one another and to their captain. The imperial propaganda in this episode appears to lie in the way the pair’s selfless love for each other implies the self-sacrifice that an emergent empire needs from its citizens, although Leah Whittington argues that the complex episode can be seen

12. J. Chimène Bateman, “Amazonian Knots: Gender, Genre, and Ariosto’s Women Warriors,” *Modern Language Notes* 122, no. 1 (January 2007): 1–23.

13. Heather James, “An Aethiopian Sodomite, Aesop, and Ovid: The Undoing of Dynastic Epic in Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*,” *Modern Philology* 117, no. 2 (November 2019): 183.

14. L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson write, “[Alexandrian scholars] were suspicious of *Iliad* X, the story of Dolon, and had doubtless recognized that it was different in style from the rest of the *Iliad* and loosely attached to the narrative” (*Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* [Oxford University Press, 1991], 13).

to put pressure on that reading, especially in the ambiguity of the poet's final, famous encomium to the "fortunate" youths.¹⁵ The grand quest of Vergil's young heroes (uniting the Trojan forces, as opposed to stealing the horses of Rhesus) marks a significant difference from the set piece in the *Iliad*. Vergil's focus on two young soldiers and their inspiring love suggests a faint hope that the pair's quest might end happily—that they might survive.¹⁶ However, that possibility vanishes with the gruesome image the following day of Nisus's and Euryalus's severed heads raised on pikes by the Rutulians to taunt the Trojans. Ultimately Nisus and Euryalus "represent one of the marginal directions not chosen by the narrative."¹⁷

The quest of the night raid in the *Furioso* is the same as that of Statius's *Thebaid*: two devoted soldiers set out to recover the body of their fallen captain. Dymas and Hopleus sneak out to bury Tydeus (10.347–448) and both die in the attempt, suggesting that the night raid in the *Furioso* will also end tragically. However, Ariosto draws repeatedly on the conventions of the epic set piece as a death trap and reverses them, dramatizing the romance mode's impulse to continue and its ability to survive.

The *Furioso* reintegrates the night raid into the main events of its narrative. Ariosto's episode begins outside the walls of the city of Paris, where Agramante's troops are advancing against the army led by Charlemagne. The young Saracen captain Dardinello bears his father Almonte's coat of arms, which is said to have belonged to Hector of Troy and is disputed by Orlando. After exhorting his troops to stand firm, like Pallas in *Aeneid* 10, Dardinello faces off against Rinaldo, and (again like Pallas) is killed. The death of Dardinello is described in a very familiar simile:

Come purpureo fior languendo muore,
che 'l vomere al passar tagliato lassa;
o come carco di superchio umore
il papaver ne l'orto il capo abbassa:
cosí, giú de la faccia ogni colore
cadendo, Dardinel di vita passa;
passa di vita, e fa passar con lui
l'ardire e la virtù di tutti i sui.

(18.153)

15. Leah Whittington observes, "The account of the night raid through the Rutulian camp that leads to the tragic deaths of the two Trojan friends cannot easily be pressed into the service of the poem's teleological plot but instead carries a surplus of meaning that is left unassimilated and unresolved" ("Vergil's Nisus and the Language of Self-Sacrifice in *Paradise Lost*," *Modern Philology* 107, no. 4 [May 2010]: 592).

16. M. Owen Lee notes that in the *Aeneid*'s night raid, "Homer's two experienced soldiers have become in Vergil two youths—Nisus and Euryalus" (*Fathers and Sons in Virgil's "Aeneid"* [New York: SUNY Press, 1979], 109).

17. Whittington, "Vergil's Nisus," 592.

[Just like a purple flower languishes in death, when a passing plow has cut it and left it hanging down; or the way a poppy, loaded with excess moisture, lowers its head in the garden: just like them, with the color draining away from his face, Dardinello passes away; he passes away, and he makes the courage and the strength of all of his men pass with him.]

The simile is among the most famous in the epic tradition. In the *Iliad*, the Trojan Gorgythion is shot by Teucer with an arrow intended for Hector, and as he languishes and dies, his head droops like a poppy laden with seeds and rainwater (8.349–53). Ovid uses the poppy lowering its head to describe the death of Hyacinthus, beloved and lamented by Apollo in the *Metamorphoses* (10.189–95); and the self-pitying narrator of Catullus's lyric poem to Furius and Aurelius describes his former love as a flower that has been snipped by a plow going by (*Carmina* 11.22–24). Vergil uses the simile for the death of Euryalus, and it is that version which is most clearly echoed by Ariosto here.¹⁸ Ariosto's pointed use of this simile draws attention to the way poetic language survives over time and across generic boundaries, from Homeric and Vergilian epic, to Ovidian "counterepic," and to the lyric poetry of Catullus.¹⁹ Dardinello is associated through this simile with Vergil's young martyr, but he is not the only Euryalus figure in the *Furioso*—it is Medoro whose physical appearance and role in the night raid correspond most closely to Vergil's beautiful youth.²⁰ Ariosto's self-conscious repetition of this simile, and his swift reincarnation of the Euryalus figure in Medoro, contribute to the transformation of the epic set piece itself into a space of romance continuing and survival. Whereas the death of Gorgythion prefigures the imminent death of Hector, and Euryalus's death leads to the more heroic fatal act of Nisus, Dardinello's passing should—if the epic convention is to be followed—herald another, more significant character's death. The stanza thus ends on an ominous note: Dardinello's death drains the "courage and strength" from "all of" his troops. However, the charming chiasmus and lilting repetition of this lament—"Dardinello di vita passa / Passa di vita, e fa passar con lui"—are misleading, and we find the opposite: Dardinello's death heightens the courage and strength of two of his followers, and leads eventually to the dramatic recovery and survival of the episode's doubled Euryalus figure, Medoro.

18. Eduardo Saccone, "Cloridano e Medoro: Con alcuni argomenti per una lettura del primo *Furioso*," *Modern Language Notes* 83, no. 1 (January 1968): 67–99. Saccone remarks, "The first four lines [of *Orlando furioso*, 18.153] nearly translate word for word *Aeneid* 9.435–7" (83).

19. James uses the term "counterepic" for the *Metamorphoses* and calls it a "document in epic iconoclasm" ("Aethiopian Sodomite," 165).

20. Medoro is an attractive teenager in the "first flush of youth" (*Orlando furioso*, 18.166), and so is Euryalus; see *Aeneid* 9.179–81.

Some critical readings of the night raid recognize the connection between the episode's use of romance tropes and its impulse to narrative continuation. Valeria Finucci writes, "Angelica is identified with romance and deviation (she comes from the East, after all)," and so in enabling Medoro to survive, Angelica accesses the power of romance to evade epic closure.²¹ Colin Burrow comments implicitly on the generic tensions in the night raid: "Ariosto makes Virgil's dead episode thrill with continuing life, and cause the main action of the poem."²² The "dead episode" is the epic set piece; Ariosto's version "thrills with continuing life" because it replaces Vergil's Euryalus with a romance survivor.²³ Both Medoro and Cloridano are associated with conventions of the romance mode when they are introduced at the end of canto 18: they are from "Tolomitta," on the eastern shore of Libya (18.165), and Medoro is an angelic youth with rosy cheeks and blond hair (18.166). The beautiful youth from the East gestures toward the mode of romance, and the search for Dardinello's body on the dark battlefield is a version of the quest and the woods of romance. The drama of Ariosto's episode (inherited from the *Aeneid*) is a crux of generic conventions pulling in opposite directions: Is this an expansive romance adventure, or an epic cul-de-sac?²⁴

Medoro and Cloridano sneak out of camp and slaughter their sleeping enemies until they find their captain's body on the clogged battlefield. When they are discovered, Medoro refuses to drop the body of his beloved captain (18.190) and is caught by the Scottish captain Zerbino, who grabs Medoro but then pauses, taking pity first on the young soldier's "lovely face" (19.10) and then on his self-sacrificing dedication to his "signor" Dardinello (19.12). While Zerbino hesitates, another soldier suddenly

21. Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 19.

22. Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 67. Burrow uses the same language when he describes Angelica's response to seeing Medoro languish near death: "Her start of unaccustomed compassion causes a continuing narrative to grow from Virgil's terminal digression" (67). Burrow's phrase "continuing narrative," like "continuing life," alludes to the romance engine of the episode, which drives past the expected "terminal digression" of the *Aeneid's* set piece.

23. Ariosto may also be thinking of the conversation between Ascanius and Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9. Ascanius, thanking the two young soldiers as they head out on their quest, says that he and Euryalus are linked: they are the same age ("mea . . . aetas"), and Ascanius embraces Euryalus as his companion ("comitem") (9.275–77). Dardinello is the Euryalus figure in this analogy, via the simile of the poppy, but Medoro is the Ascanius figure, destined to survive as a royal heir.

24. Javitch writes, "Ariosto's modulation of Medoro's fatal sortie into a love story with a *lieto fine* seems to me to be yet another brilliant instance of Ariosto's ability to accommodate Virgilian epic matter to the thematic and formal demands of romance" ("Grafting of Virgilian Epic," 69). I take this episode as more of an active, self-conscious revision of epic precedent than an elegant hybridization of generic modes.

stabs Medoro in his “delicate” chest, which recalls the death of Vergil’s Euryalus, stabbed in his “shining breast” (9.432), as well as the violent betrayal of Dolon by Odysseus and Diomedes in *Iliad* 10. The soldiers scatter, leaving Medoro for dead, but the most desired character in the *Furioso*, Angelica, happens to pass by: she arrives “a caso,” by chance—the magic carpet of romance (19.17). Because Medoro is beautiful and incapacitated, he becomes the object of Angelica’s empowered gaze, reversing the scenario that has been recurring throughout the poem, where Angelica has been the object of the male gaze, and has repeatedly fled.²⁵ Angelica then takes Medoro to a nearby farmhouse where she cures his wound with magic herbs—the same “dittamo”/“dictamnium” with which Venus cures her son Aeneas.²⁶

The elements of the romance mode that recur in the night raid—the Eastern princess and her magic herbs, the beauty of Ariosto’s fortunate, adventurous youth—contribute to or explain Medoro’s survival; but the mode of romance is also, as Heather James notes, the influence of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* at work in this episode, in tension with the Vergilian paradigm.²⁷ Vergil’s Euryalus dies, but when Ovid’s Hyacinthus is wounded and languishes near death, his head also bowing like a poppy whose stem has been clipped, Apollo tries to heal his young lover with herbs, like Angelica and the languishing Medoro.²⁸ Apollo fails to revive Hyacinthus but is able to grant him a kind of immortality in the flower whose purple leaves recall the stain of his blood, and whose markings (“AI, AI” [10.215]) imitate the grieving god’s sighs. The recurrent question in the *Metamorphoses*—How can a narrative continue?—is the operative narrative question in Ariosto’s night raid. Ovid’s highly self-reflective counterepic offers one strategy for continuing: a change in form (the hyacinth or, in the case of Daphne, the laurel) need not end a narrative. Apollo promises Hyacinthus a poetic future, saying, “My songs, my hand plucking the lyre, will tell always of you,” and Ariosto borrows this Ovidian strategy of poetic survival to continue his Euryalus figure’s story, even inviting others to do so in the famous,

25. Shemek observes that Ariosto leaves Angelica gazing at the unconscious Medoro before bringing them together: “Thus Angelica remains poised, significantly, *looking* on this youth for six cantos” (*Ladies Errant*, 70).

26. Angelica uses “panacea” or “dittamo” (19.22); Venus cures her son Aeneas with “dictamnium” (Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.412). This momentary caretaking/maternal role is a significant element in Angelica’s *innamoramento*; see Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 540.

27. James writes, “Vergil’s *Aeneid*, as Rome’s epic about empire building, oversees the *Furioso*’s ultimate duties to military triumph, hierarchical order, and dynastic succession. By contrast, the romance genre, spurred by its classical precedents in Homer’s *Odyssey* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, generates narrative strands so abundant that no reader may easily hold them in memory” (“Aethiopian Sodomite,” 163–64).

28. Apollo “nunc animam admotis fugientem sustinet herbis” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.188); Angelica “si dispose operar con succo d’erbe” (*Orlando furioso*, 19.22).

final exhortation, “Perhaps someone else will tell [Angelica and Medoro’s tale] in a better song.”²⁹

The generic tension between romance survival and epic closure in this episode of the *Furioso* appears in a set of allusions to characters from classical antiquity who represent unexpected survival, on one hand, and early death on the other. When Medoro and Cloridano are searching for their captain’s body among the “horrible mess” (18.183) of corpses on the battlefield, Medoro prays to the Moon: “show me where my lord lies among so many / he who, in life, adhered to your holy rites” (18.184). And then:

La Luna a quel pregar la nube aperse
 (o fosse caso o pur la tanta fede),
 bella come fu allor ch’ella s’offerse,
 e nuda in braccio a Endimion si diede.
 (18.185)

[The Moon parted a cloud in response to that prayer (whether by chance or because of his great faith) as beautiful as when she offered herself to Endymion, and gave herself up naked into his arms.]

The prayer to the moon by the protagonist of the night raid is common to Vergil and Statius, but the allusion to Endymion is unique to Ariosto, and it serves to index both Medoro’s survival and his potential for generativity. In most versions of this myth, the moon, as the Titaness Selene or later as Diana/Artemis, falls in love with Endymion and, according to Pausanias, bears him fifty daughters.³⁰ The moment here when the moon appears as she did to Endymion anticipates the scene in which Angelica comes upon Medoro—also by “caso” (19.17). When Medoro languishes, wounded and lying on the ground, Angelica “comes upon” him (the verb is repeated: “sopravenia” [19.16] and “sopravenne” [19.17]). There is a visual similarity between the moon looking down on sleeping Endymion, and then raising him up, and Angelica looking down on the prostrate Medoro before healing him. Medoro resembles Endymion in his surpassing, youthful beauty; passive elevation by a goddess/woman; and, proleptically, his role as a parent.

29. “Te lyra pulsa manu, te carmina nostra sonabunt” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.205); “Forse altri canterà con miglior plettro” (*Orlando furioso*, 30.16).

30. There are many versions of this myth, repeated by classical authors from Plato to Lucian and Ovid; see Ovid, *Heroides* 18.49–74. The emphasis in Ariosto’s phrase on “nuda in braccio” recalls the lines from Propertius: “nudus et Endymion Phoebi cepisse sororem / dicitur et nuda concubuisse deae” (*Elegies*, ed. and trans. G.P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 18 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990], 2.15.15–16). See also Jane Davidson Reid, *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300–1990s* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 373–82. Endymion is said by every Greek author of his tale except Hesiod to have fathered children with the moon.

Ariosto heightens the drama of the languishing Medoro's uncertain fate by juxtaposing Endymion with a character who functions as his narrative opposite: Sophocles's Antigone. When he is caught by Zerbino, Medoro responds defiantly, saying:

né pensi che di vita abbi disio:
 ho tanta di mia vita, e non piú, cura
 quanta ch'al mio signor dia sepultura.
 (19.11)

[Don't think that I am clinging to life: I have just as much concern for my life, and not more, as I have for the proper burial of my captain.]

Medoro sounds here like Statius's Dymas, valiantly stabbing himself in the chest, and even more like Antigone when she is threatened by Creon. She says:

And so, for me to meet this fate's no grief.
 But if I left that corpse, my mother's son,
 dead and unburied I'd have cause to grieve
 as now I grieve not.³¹

Both Antigone and Medoro are blunt and unyielding; they share the common fear that an unburied loved one (her brother Polyneices, his captain Dardinello) will be desecrated by wild animals. When he is apprehended, Medoro says to Zerbino:

E se pur pascer vói fiere et augelli,
 che 'n te il furor sia del teban Creonte,
 far lor convito di miei membri, e quelli
 sepelir lascia del figliuol d'Almonte.
 (19.12)

[And if you want to feed beasts and scavenging birds, because you are as enraged as Creon of Thebes, make a banquet of my limbs for them, and allow me to bury the body of the son of Almonte.]

The comparison of Zerbino to Creon makes the allusion to *Antigone* explicit. Both Medoro and Antigone are preternaturally fixated on burying the dead; Antigone's obsession with her dead brother is set against her potential to marry and reproduce. Instead of relenting and marrying Haemon, Antigone remains defiant, and when she enters the cave where Creon has sentenced her to die at the play's end she laments, "O tomb, O marriage chamber . . . No marriage bed, no marriage song for me, / and

31. Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 38.

since no wedding, so no child to rear.”³² Antigone and Haemon end up in a death embrace, just like Nisus and Euryalus, and Dymas and Hopleus. But where Antigone’s marriage bed becomes a tomb, Medoro’s experience is the opposite: he languishes near death by the body of his companion, and is then revived by a princess who becomes his bride.

Ariosto’s allusion to Antigone, and the memory of her dying lament about the care of children, bring the question of marriage and reproduction to the forefront of the night raid. John Watkins comments on Medoro’s survival, “In his most conspicuous departure from Virgil—Medoro’s recovery and subsequent union with Angelica—Ariosto dismisses the *Aeneid*’s masculine, militarist values as an adolescent homosexuality that his hero eventually outgrows.”³³ This comment would also apply to the “masculine, militarist values” of the *Thebaid*, although Ariosto is not just dismissing “adolescent homosexuality,” since Antigone is included in the matrix of literary allusions in the night raid. But Watkins’s focus on the potential for reproduction is an important aspect of Medoro’s survival. The underlying drama of this episode at the level of character is the question of survival and reproduction. Ariosto suggests that Medoro could be either like Endymion, passively elevated to fatherhood, or Antigone, fiercely determined but dead and childless at an early age.

Medoro survives to become central to the plot of the *Furioso*: his love lyrics, inscribed on trees where he married Angelica, are the cause of Orlando’s madness at the midpoint of the 1532 edition of the poem (23.121).³⁴ Medoro moves from being a character whose death is overdetermined by literary precedent to ruling with Angelica in “India.” The highly self-conscious elaboration of this strategy of narrative continuity against epic closure suggests that for Ariosto, the epic tradition itself recovers and evolves through the vigor and resilience of the romance survivor.

“LE FEMINE OMICIDE” (THE HOMICIDAL WOMEN) (19.57)

The tale of the homicidal women (or the women of Crete) is interlaced with the night raid.³⁵ The poetic narrator in the *Furioso* claims that the

32. *Ibid.*, 54.

33. John Watkins, *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 156.

34. See Ayesha Ramachandran, “The Uses of Lyric in *Orlando furioso*,” *Modern Language Notes* 133, no. 1 (January 2018): 112–26.

35. Ascoli describes the way Ariosto borrows and develops the technique of intratextual narrative interlace, primarily from Boiardo: “It is clear that isolating one structure or interpretive focal point to the exclusion of others obscures the essentially interlaced character of the poem, which incessantly juxtaposes its constitutive elements with one another and with the literary texts and cultural discourses to which they refer in a volatile game of ironic perspectives” (“Ariosto and the ‘Fier Pastor,’” 492).

technique of interlace serves to delight the reader by varying the threads of the plot, but this episode significantly repeats the topos of the youthful survivor. In both episodes the romance tale is a strategy to recover peripheral characters and narrative possibilities from the constraints of the epic mode.

The tone of this episode differs significantly from the tone of the night raid, which indicates another aspect of the romance mode's strategy for poetic survival. The episode begins with a storm at sea, that unmistakable topos of the romance tale; Marfisa and her crew eventually land safely at Alessandria (modern Iskenderun, Turkey [19.43]) and learn that anyone who disembarks at this port is either enslaved or killed (19.55, 57). The only way that outsiders can get around the predicament is by choosing a single representative to face a two-part challenge, a battle against ten knights and a night with ten women. When Astolfo hears this strange custom he "couldn't help but laugh" (19.59). This moment of levity allows for additional narrative possibilities, things that epic decorum might otherwise prevent from being said. The characters all draw lots and Marfisa, having argued her way in, is chosen to take on the two challenges, a moment that allows for another comic aside: she can resolve any challenge, including a night with ten women, with her sword, she says, like Alexander and the Gordian knot (19.74). Astolfo's laughter and Marfisa's comic boast are responses to the threat of death and enslavement posed by the homicidal women; they allow the characters to circumvent obstacles and the story to continue. This strategy of levity will also resolve the entire episode: Astolfo's magical, "highly un-Roland-like horn," J. Chimène Bateman notes, "makes a mockery of epic valor," and allows the knights to escape from the pursuing mob.³⁶

The tenth knight Marfisa faces in the first part of the challenge is Guidone Selvaggio, a handsome youth who battles her to a draw and then proceeds to recount the history of Alessandria. During the Trojan War, he says, all the women in Greece took young lovers, and some bore children (20.10). When the Greek soldiers returned from Troy after twenty years away, they proved to be surprisingly understanding of the situation:

Le case lor trovano i Greci piene
de l'altrui figli; e per parer commune
perdonano alle mogli, che san bene
che tanto non potean vivir digiune.

(20.11)

36. Bateman, "Amazonian Knots," 20. Bateman sees Marfisa as an epic character representing the brutality of both the Amazons and the homicidal women, but Marfisa's boast about her sword proves empty.

[The Greek men found their homes full of other men's children; and by unanimous decision they forgive their wives, whom they well knew couldn't survive without nourishment for that long.]

There is an awful lot of suspense in the enjambment of the phrases “by unanimous decision” (“per parer commune”) and “they forgive their wives” (“perdonano alle mogli”) in this stanza. The returning Greek soldiers respond to the generation of illegitimate children in their households in the mode and spirit of romance—not by ending things, but by reconciling with their spouses and continuing on with their lives. Romance recovers the stories of these exiled illegitimate sons, demonstrating that the opposite of an epic *aristeia*—for example, Odysseus's violent response to finding his home full of sexual rivals—is a shrug.

The tale of the homicidal women presents a series of youthful romance characters who survive against expectations. First is the entire generation of illegitimate children born in Greece during the Trojan War. After their parents reconcile, the children are exiled and compelled to seek their various fortunes in the world—some in arms, and some in the study of the arts and letters; others farm, serve in court, or become shepherds (20.12): there are bastards everywhere, Ariosto suggests.³⁷ Eleanora Stoppino sees in this episode an “uncontrollable anxiety over legitimacy,” related to the increasing presence of powerful women in city-states like Ferrara and Mantua in the sixteenth century.³⁸ The anxiety Stoppino identifies in this episode may be real, but I see the murderous Amazonian women as presenting another formal opportunity for Ariosto to explore the romance episode's ability to continue in the face of imminent death. The tale of the homicidal women is interlaced with the night raid, both as alternating threads in the *Furioso's* plot—it begins with Marfisa and her crew caught in the storm (19.42), interrupting Medoro and Angelica's journey to Cathay—and as peripheral tales from the Trojan War. In Ariosto's sources the character Falanto is born during the Messina war to an obscure matron, but in the *Furioso* the story is of Clytemnestra and her cohort's illegitimate children.³⁹

37. Jane Fair Bestor asserts, “For almost one hundred fifty years, illegitimates ruled [the house of Este's] dominions” (“Marriage and Succession in the House of Este: A Literary Perspective,” in *Phaethon's Children: The Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, ed. Dennis Looney and Deanna Shemek [Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2005], 49).

38. Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 72. Stoppino connects the episode in Ariosto's poem with the paintings of “Amazonian types” that appeared in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, which functioned as rhetorical strategies praising women and implying that they should “abandon feminine weakness” (61–64).

39. Pio Rajna mentions Ariosto's sources (Strabo 6.3, Justin 3.4) for the story of Falanto and notes the substantial changes Ariosto makes: “He begins by substituting the Trojan War for the Messina War, and Clytemnestra for an obscure matron” (*Le fonti dell' "Orlando furioso"*: *Ricerche e studi*, 2nd ed. [Florence: Sansoni, 1900], 293–94).

Ariosto's decision to resituate the stories of Falanto and his peers in post-Trojan War Greece makes the homicidal women a multiform of the night raid, replacing the epic set piece/death trap with an inescapable, murderous gynocracy.

Young, handsome men spring up in this episode in wryly comic succession. Falanto is a young man ("giovinetto") who is "fresh as a lily" (20.13); he and his fellow mercenaries elope with the women of Crete to Alessandria, tire of them after ten days, then steal away to seek more adventures. Many years later another young man appears in Alessandria: this "giovinetto," Elbanio, claims descent from the lineage of Hercules (20.36), and like Medoro and Falanto he is very attractive—according to the narrator of this tale, he is the most beautiful cavalier in the world (20.55). The inset tale of Elbanio and Alessandra repeats the storyline of Medoro and Angelica's relationship: Elbanio is imprisoned and threatened with imminent death, but another princess, Alessandra (with the help of her mother, Orontea), rescues and marries him. The recurrence in these two episodes of young men who survive in the face of almost certain death—Medoro, the generation of illegitimate children in Greece/Falanto, Elbanio, Guidone—is a *mise en abyme* of beautiful, fortunate, romance youths.

Stoppino refers to Falanto and Elbanio as the "errant youths that frame the narrative of Amazonian foundation," which is accurate, although there is a broader narrative framework connecting these episodes.⁴⁰ Canto 19 of the *Furioso* begins with Medoro: he is referred to as a "giovine" (19.3) and a "giovinetto" (19.20). Canto 19 ends with two references to yet another "giovinetto" (108) whose name is as yet unknown—Guidone Selvaggio, we learn in the next canto. Like Medoro, Guidone faces a dead end ("abandon any hope" of escape, he says to the others [20.70]), and he is fortunate in being aided by a maternal caretaker—Marfisa, who swears to free him—and by a magical object characteristic of romance tales: Astolfo's horn, the counterpart of Angelica's herbs.⁴¹ There are thus two sets of narrative frames here: the internal bracket of the homicidal women's origin story is the pair of ancient Greeks, Falanto and Elbanio, while Medoro and Guidone Selvaggio are the handsome contemporary youths who link the two interlaced episodes.

Guidone, a character from the medieval romance tradition, is not more than eighteen years old (19.107), and he inherits Elbanio's position among the homicidal women (20.60).⁴² An illegitimate son of Duke Amone in

40. Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 72.

41. "Tu m'avrai pronto a seguirarti et a morirti a canto / ma vivi rimaner non faccían conto" (You will find me quick to follow you and die alongside you / but don't think that we can remain alive here) (20.72).

42. Rajna says that "Guy le Sauvage" was a "well-known character in chivalric literature," and that Ariosto's contemporary readers would have known him from the *Ancoia* and the *Palamedès*, among other sources (*Le fonti*, 307).

Ariosto's poem, Guidone longs to escape from his imprisonment by the homicidal women and be reunited with his adventuring Chiaramonte kin (20.63). After Guidone escapes from Alessandria he goes on to encounter Rinaldo; not recognizing one another, they fight, but when night falls they pause and introduce themselves, and Guidone is welcomed by his half brother and their other relatives back into the extended family:

Guidon coi frati e coi parenti in schiera
se ne tornó sotto la lor bandiera.
(31.36)

[Guidone returned to the cohort of his brothers and his relatives, under their flag.]

This moment, in which an esteemed cavalier is reintegrated into his noble family, anticipates (or perhaps influences?) the central narrative strategy of Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581). The first *ottava* of Tasso's epic poem describes the Christian captain Goffredo's project of unifying his troops in their siege of Jerusalem:

Il Ciel gli [a Goffredo] dié favore, e sotto a i santi
segni ridusse i suoi compagni erranti.⁴³

[Heaven favored [Goffredo], and he united his errant companions under the holy banners.]

Goffredo's military project of bringing together disparate troops and errant captains parallels Tasso's poetic project of achieving epic order against problematic romance wandering; but this narrative strategy, which seems to be invoked apotropically to ward off the contagion of a sprawling, unruly romance poem like the *Furioso*, is also part of the *Furioso*. Ariosto recovers Guidone Selvaggio to his family cohort and into the main narrative in the same way that Goffredo drives his own errant "companions" to be reunited under a single banner (in a linguistically similar way: Guidone returns "sotto la lor bandiera"; Goffredo regroups his men "sotto a i santi / segni"). Ariosto's permanent narrative reincorporation of Guidone, a character in the romance tradition, is a model for Tasso's own strategy of crafting an orderly, Vergilian epic poem.

Like Medoro, Guidone is integrated in the main plot lines of the *Furioso*, and he too gains a spouse along the way (20.74).⁴⁴ This pattern of escape

43. Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Turin: Einaudi, 2014), 1.1.

44. Shemek notes that Bradamante is the only female character in the *Furioso* who represents a romance thread and is reincorporated into the main narrative plot of the poem, but Bradamante "takes up this subordinate role in the realm of the *family*" (*Ladies Errant*,

from a life-threatening encounter, and then marriage and reproduction, clearly distinguishes these romance characters from the purely epic heroes of the *Furioso*. Both Rodomonte and Orlando are rejected by their chosen “ladies,” and both fail to reproduce. Like Vergil’s Turnus, Rodomonte’s death in the poem’s last lines represents his political failure and his inability to continue a dynastic line; Rodomonte’s own lineage is buried in historical obscurity despite his somewhat absurd attempt to preserve it by confiscating arms and heraldic symbols at the tomb of Issabella (29.39). In the poem’s supreme irony, the Achilles-like Orlando loses out to a poor foot soldier in the competition for Angelica’s affection, and his early death by betrayal is foretold in the *Chanson de Roland*.⁴⁵ The survival and success that Medoro, Guidone, and the other romance youths have in these episodes contrasts with the epic heroes’ failure to create either political or dynastic legacies—more evidence that for Ariosto, the generative element in the evolution of heroic poetry is the fortunate romance youth.

Guidone’s escape from Alessandria recalls the original romance plot. Albert Ascoli writes, “It is one of the little ironies of the history of criticism that the first ‘romance’, the *Odyssey*, which traces the ‘errors’ of the ironic hero *par excellence*, culminates, as the *Iliad* clearly does not, in a relatively successful reintegration of self, family, and community.”⁴⁶ The little irony extends from the *Odyssey* to these interlaced episodes of the *Furioso*. Romance wandering actively recovers characters and reintegrates them into the central episodes of Ariosto’s poem, reuniting Guidone with his famous clan, and raising Medoro to an Eastern throne.

ROMANCE SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE

The survival of romance characters from Astyanax to Medoro and Guidone in *Orlando Furioso* recalls the survival of ancient texts themselves, recovered from monasteries, emended with philological care, and

78). Medoro and Guidone are romance characters who are reincorporated into the main narrative of the poem within the structure of the family, although in their cases as patriarchs.

45. Constance Jordan, “Writing beyond the *Querelle*: Gender and History in *Orlando furioso*,” in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1999), 295–317. Jordan writes, “The idea that mortality is the condition of generativity is obviously Virgilian; in the *Orlando Furioso*, it is illustrated by Ruggiero’s career. As long as he is Atlante’s prisoner, he will be prevented from both marriage and a violent, premature death, events that appear to be deeply implicated in each other inasmuch as generation implies mortality” (301). Ruggiero’s ability to marry and reproduce comes, I would argue, from his associations with the romance type—youth, fortune, and passive elevation to prominence—as opposed to his epic role as the Aeneas figure in the *Furioso*.

46. Ascoli, *Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony*, 18. Bateman also quotes this passage, relating it to the reintegration of Bradamante in a “master-narrative of family and community” (“Amazonian Knots,” 8).

recirculated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Like the manuscript of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, romance characters in the poem languish near death and are recovered through the caretaking of a figure who appears by chance. Having discovered a manuscript of Quintilian at St. Gall in 1416, Poggio Bracciolini writes to Guarino of Verona, "We have restored Quintilian to his original dress and dignity, to his former appearance, and to a condition of sound health."⁴⁷ Incomplete manuscripts from antiquity were called *mutili*, or "damaged," by Italian humanists, but through philological caretaking—a kind of nursing, Poggio implies—a text can be "restored . . . to a condition of sound health."⁴⁸ In the same way, a romance character who languishes from a wound or from a threat of death may be restored to health by a maternal caretaker and recovered to a supportive community.

In the *Adages* (1500, 1508, 1536), Desiderius Erasmus describes his own philological project as, among other things, one of restoration and caretaking:

By Hercules, it is a herculean task and worthy of some royal spirit, to restore to the world a thing so divine collapsed in ruin down to its foundations, to track down the hidden, to dig up what is buried, to call things extinct back to life, to make the mutilated whole, and to emend texts depraved in so many ways. . . . But whoso from near extinction rescues the Republic of Letters—a task almost more difficult than establishing it in the first place—he labors on something holy and immortal, and he sustains the hopes not of just one province or another, but of all humanity and all ages.⁴⁹

Erasmus describes the project of humanism in multiple ways: it is the work of restoration, tracking down the hidden and digging up the buried, calling things back to life, making the mutilated whole, and rescuing the Republic of Letters from near extinction. This description is also apt for Ariosto's romance characters, who recover from an existential threat (epic closure) like that from which Erasmus imagines the Republic of Letters to be in need of rescue. The figure of the humanist underlies the caretaking characters (primarily Angelica and Marfisa) in the *Furioso*; they "make the mutilated whole" and restore hidden, damaged, or threatened characters to the world. The theme of recovery distinguishes the survival of literature

47. Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 321.

48. Reynolds and Wilson comment that Poggio discovered at St. Gall "a complete Quintilian (previous humanists had had to make do with *mutili*)" (*Scribes and Scholars*, 137).

49. Desiderius Erasmus, *Adagia*, sections 16–17, accessed via e-rara, https://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/structure/12666303. See also Thomas M. Greene, "Erasmus' 'Festina Lente': Vulnerabilities of the Humanist Text," in *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1–17.

from the noted “rebirth” of visual and plastic arts from classical antiquity. Painting and sculpture, along with certain types of architecture, were widely thought of as having died and then, through the “divine” skill of artists like Michelangelo (according to Giorgio Vasari), been “reborn”; perhaps the most prominent of these claims is Angelo Poliziano’s 1490 inscription on the bell tower of Florence’s cathedral, an encomium to Giotto: “Ille ego sum per quem / pictura extincta revixit” (I am he through whom the art of painting, once dead, was reborn). Literary texts, the *Furioso* implies, are different from the visual arts: they do not die, but languish; they can be recovered, and with proper caretaking, they can survive.

* * *

The *Furioso* is framed by battles that correspond to its two dominant generic modes. The hand-to-hand combat between Ruggiero and Rodomonte in canto 46 establishes the marriage between Ruggiero and Bradamante, which, like that of Aeneas and Lavinia, completes the genealogical “history” required by the poets’ patrons and ends the poem on an unmistakably epic note. The battle between Sacripante and Rinaldo in canto 2 is a romance episode that proleptically counters the poem’s Vergilian ending. At the end of canto 1, Angelica and Sacripante are being pursued by Rinaldo; in canto 2, the two warriors engage in battle and Angelica escapes on Rinaldo’s horse. She encounters a lean hermit on a donkey who conjures a spirit-factotum from a book; that messenger boldly interrupts the dueling cavaliers, asking them:

Per cortesia (disse), un di voi mi mostre,
 quando anco uccida l’altro, che gli vaglia:
 che merto avrete alle fatiche vostre,
 finita che sia tra voi la battaglia . . . ?
 (2.16)

[I beg of you (he said), can someone here explain to me what good it will do you when one of you has killed the other? What will your efforts have earned you when the battle between you is over . . . ?]

This scene of hand-to-hand combat between knights—one Christian and one Muslim, fighting over a princess—anticipates the poem’s final battle. The Christian hermit’s conjuring of the spirit from the book to help the beautiful, helpless maiden is a moment of romance magic, and the subsequent flight of the two warriors begins the romance wandering of the episode. But the spirit’s question—“What good will it do you when one of you has killed the other?”—is also directed toward Ruggiero and Rodomonte in canto 46, and to the logic of epic violence.

The two battles can be read along the lines of the critical consensus about how epic and romance episodes work in the poem: the romance

book causes the narrative to devolve into wandering and digression, and the epic ending ties up the narrative threads. But the battle in canto 2 establishes the way romance continues as an oppositional voice, explicitly questioning the logic of mortal combat and of the violent ending of the poem. The hermit's book is the romance mode disrupting the battle and sending the Muslim and Christian running—toward more adventures and away from death. The two battles stand in parallel as ideological comments on the power of romance to continue a narrative and evade the threat of death, and of epic to end opposition and establish authority.

Deanna Shemek questions the way some critical interpretations of narrative structure seem to privilege closure. She writes, of readers who see the marriage of Bradamante and Ruggiero in the end of the *Furioso* as a “definitive endorsement of patriarchal power and masculine rule,” “narrative resolution—the ‘end’ of any story—appears, in Jameson’s treatment, to render all other narrative and poetic elements ‘unrealized’ and significant only as symptoms of what the text seems to control or master. Thus in remarkably authoritarian fashion, closure emerges as the ultimate key to meaning.”⁵⁰ Shemek’s comment implies that there is an antiauthoritarian value in resisting critical approaches that privilege “narrative resolution,” and that poetic elements may have meaning beyond the way they are controlled or mastered by the dominant narrative design.⁵¹ Heather James also writes about the emphasis on narrative closure in interpretations of the *Furioso*: “While [the three editions of the *Furioso*] involve changes great and small in the poem’s narrative sequence and patterns of imitation, just one matter of form dominates modern criticism: the sense of the ending.”⁵² In James’s reading of the *Furioso*, romance is a space for “epistemological openness” in which a poet (her model for this is Ovid) can push the limits

50. Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 79. She continues, “This theorization . . . appears to me quite antithetical to literature’s aims and to its powers of figuration” (79). The phrase “powers of figuration” seems to gesture toward Erich Auerbach’s idea of “figura” as the ultimate critical refusal to privilege closure in interpretation: “Thus the figures are not only tentative; they are also the tentative form of something eternal and timeless; they point not only to the concrete future, but also to something that always has been and always will be” (*Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* [New York: Meridian Books, 1959], 59).

51. In *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic* (Stanford University Press, 1992), Susanne Wofford writes, “The readings proposed here thus question the affirmation of a work’s closure as its determining self-definition, and argue that epic poetry needs to be understood in a double way that resists giving interpretive privilege to the moments of reduction necessary for the fulfillment of literary pattern” (12). Joseph C. Sitterson Jr. asks, “If Christian allegorizers like Vegius can see the abrupt, problematic nature of Vergil’s ending, why couldn’t Ariosto?” (“Allusive and Elusive Meanings: Reading Ariosto’s Vergilian Ending,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 45, no. 1 [Spring 1992]: 10).

52. James, “Aethiopian Sodomite,” 163.

of liberty of speech.⁵³ James describes the stories Rinaldo hears in his journey along the river Po in cantos 42–43 as a “narrative annex, contiguous with but separate from the dominant genre of imperial epic.”⁵⁴ The phrase “narrative annex” puts the modes of the hybrid poem in spatial terms, and in doing so James suggests that epic closure does not “seem . . . to control or master” (Shemek) the *Furioso*’s romance episodes, which continue to exist in siloed parallel to the imperial plot. This is a very compelling reading of the romance episodes in question, although the romance episodes I consider go further in connecting what appears at first to be a “narrative annex” (the night raid, the colony at Alessandria) to the main events of the poem. David Quint acknowledges that the romance mode performs a kind of resistance to epic teleology and the consolidation of political power—“*within epic* the digressive ‘formlessness’ of romance can embody the oppositional itself”—but he argues that romance ultimately embodies a “collapse of narrative”: “romance is a narrative representation of the non-narratable.”⁵⁵ The episodes of the night raid and the homicidal women in the *Furioso* challenge this reading. As with the *Odyssey*, the romance tale can be a digression that ultimately ends in reintegration and homecoming. But the mode itself always embodies the “oppositional”; it is not a “collapse of narrative” even when romance tales expand without apparent end. In its experimental and oppositional stance, the romance tale does not aspire to displace epic’s teleological power or fail to usurp control of the narrative; it functions as a permanent force of resistance to epic’s reduction of narrative possibilities and its elimination of political opposition.⁵⁶ Stories about caretaking, recovery, and survival especially stand in opposition to stories about violent conquest and the founding of empires.

It is ultimately poetic practice itself that undermines the critical reliance on formal closure as the key to narrative structure. Poems survive, both as physical texts, however damaged or partial, and as stories that continue. Whatever their level of formal completion, epic and hybrid epic romance poems appear open, in a way, to subsequent poets. Ariosto’s elaboration of an episode as modular as the night raid into a central strand of the principle narrative thread of his poem suggests that to a poet, the *Iliad*, the *Thebaid*, and the *Aeneid* are no more inviolably complete than the *Orlando*

53. *Ibid.*, 183.

54. *Ibid.*, 166.

55. David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 182, 45, 46.

56. The romance mode can be seen to function in the *Furioso* as a mobile sanctuary. Rachel Ida Buff asserts that sanctuary “becomes not only a specific place in a church or other building but a set of practices by which people come into relations of accompaniment and solidarity” (“Sanctuary Everywhere: Some Key Words, 1945–Present,” *Radical History Review*, no. 135 [October 2019]: 17).

innamorato or the *Furioso*. The model for this critical orientation comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: time and again, that poem's narrator self-consciously continues stories and recovers characters, despite the obstacles that would end them. Ariosto's romance episodes continue, resisting both narrative closure and the consolidation of political power, and his romance characters survive, paralleling the recovery and survival of ancient and medieval manuscripts nursed back into circulation by humanist wanderers and philologists.