The epic *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533) both celebrates human creativity and warns of the perils that can accompany journeys of the mind. In Ariosto’s text, Orlando and Astolfo represent two aspects of the human imagination and its role in the journey towards knowledge. One is an earth-bound voyage of desire and insanity, the other is an otherworldly journey incorporating the metaphor of flight. Through this earthly odyssey and its lunar counterpart we will examine the places in Ariosto’s text that are caught in the balance between reason and love’s madness. The focus will be on Ariosto’s portrayal of knowledge and its relationship to the self and to poetry. The danger inherent in the imagination and the search for knowledge, concepts that connect Ariosto, a Renaissance humanist, to other scholars of his time will be of particular interest to this examination.

Ariosto’s treatment of madness and the self echoes the ideas of his contemporaries clustered at the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent. His portrayal of these concepts, as reflected in the very title of his work, places the Neoplatonic emphasis on divine fury at the heart of his epic.\(^1\) Ariosto’s language in the *Furioso* lead me to focus on two scholars central to the circle of Florentine Renaissance Neoplatonism: Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), and his friend, teacher and supporter, Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498), a poet and a critic. The differences in Ficino and Landino’s respective treatments of knowledge and the imagination remind us that the Neoplatonic circle was not homogeneous in its thinking, but varied, evolving and dialectical. In this article I will show how Landino defines the creative imagination in terms of an external relationship, that is, as an activity that seeks knowledge in the divine sphere, while Ficino’s definition, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between genius and the internal, human self.

Ariosto would have known well the works of both Ficino and Landino, both of whom died when he was still a young man. His epic thus reflects

\(^1\)Although the Neoplatonic ideas of *furor* are clearly evoked in Ariosto’s text, see Carroll for a discussion on the Stoic influence on the work. Carroll states that the narrative “presupposes Stoic notions about reason and order” (9).

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their divergent ideologies. His text is not only a microcosm of this diverse thinking, but also the embodiment of his deliberate play upon the ideas of his predecessors. In fact, Ariosto incorporates elements from both writers into his epic, though ultimately, as I will show in this study, it is with Ficino’s work that his ideas are most closely allied.

The *Orlando furioso* places love, the great Platonic and *stilnovista* theme, at its centre, with madness and the journey towards knowledge revolving around it. The constant references to divinity in Angelica’s descriptions—the most blatant being her name—highlight the imagination of desire in this text. Ariosto imbues her with traditional ideas on the role of beauty and the path to blessedness. Peter V. Marinelli, in fact, described the poem as a purposeful juxtaposition of a Neoplatonic hierarchy of loves (115). For Marinelli, Orlando represents “amore bestiale,” the lowest form of love madness born from appetitive sensuality (119). But there are other, more ambiguous, aspects of this character that reflect the complexity of both the poem and its poet.

To understand better Ariosto’s approach to these themes a closer examination of the texts of his two near-contemporaries is in order. Landino’s work provides us with an obvious example of the Neoplatonic representation of imagination inspiring desire. His vast and successful *Dante con l’esposizione di Cristoforo Landino* (1481) interprets the entire *Commedia* as representative of the Platonic allegory of the flight of the soul towards Truth. Landino emphasizes the educational element of the poetic imagination and places beauty and the path to knowledge within that context. He elevates the status of poetic ornamentation by celebrating the poet’s use of original and innovative rhetorical devices to amplify the richness of the text. In particular, Landino praises Dante’s ability to create pleasure through poetry. The poet’s skilful *ingegno* is laudable because it fashions a beautiful veil over poetry’s truth. This covering serves not to deceive, but rather to compel the listener to seek further past the shimmering surface in order to find the hidden

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2“[Dante] el cui poema e nella invenzione è unico e nella disposizione artificiosissimo e nella elocuzione in molti colori e lumi oratori supremo. E quello che è mirabile, congemma e’ colori in forma che un da altro ornato piglia: il che all’auditore multiplica la voluttà” Landino, *Scritti* 1:148). (“[Dante] ...whose poem is unique in its choice of subjects, very well-designed in their distribution, and sublime in its style rich with differentiated tones and rhetorical ornamentation. And, what is amazing is that he matches the tones together in such a way that one receives beauty from the other, which multiplies the pleasure of the listener.” Here and hereafter, English translations from Landino’s works are mine.) This idea is reiterated in the third of Landino’s *Disputationes Camaldulenses.*
meaning, using the imagination as a guide in this educational journey. For Landino, poetry leads to truth by virtue of its veil. *Ingegno*, implicated in the search for knowledge, ultimately leads the pupil to find an even greater and more satisfying pleasure than the superficial one of gratifying the senses. Ariosto echoes Landino's ideas on the necessity of variety and pleasure. The words of Ariosto's narrator reflect this underlying sense:

Come raccende il gusto il mutar esca,
cosi mi par che la mia istoria, quanto
or qua or lì più variata sia.
meno a chi l'udirà noiosa fia. (Orlando furioso, 13.80).

(As varying the dishes quickens the appetite, so it is with my story: the more varied it is, the less likely it is to bore my listeners.)³

Following Landino's logic, Orlando and the readers of the *Furioso* should pursue beauty and enjoy the pleasure of that pursuit so as to attain a greater understanding that will, in turn, allow them to begin the search for a more profound knowledge.

If Angelica is the beauty that should spark a desire that will lead Orlando to knowledge of the divine, Orlando's educational journey is problematic. In Landino's scheme, characters driven by love should seek beauty on Earth in order to discover its heavenly counterpart. But Orlando is no pupil of Landino, seeking beneath the veil to find a greater truth. In his search for knowledge he takes, instead, a very dark path and remains, throughout most of the text, firmly enmeshed in the earthly sphere.

Orlando is not simply an illustration of the Neoplatonic search for knowledge, nor even a demonstration of the failure of such a search.⁴ Instead, Orlando's primary role as a character seems tied to another, more critical area of Ariosto's thought. Orlando and the other figures in Ariosto's

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³Here and hereafter, Italian quotations of the *Orlando furioso* are from the 1987 text edited by Marcello Turchi, while quotations in English are from the 1983 translation by Guido Waldman.

⁴See Cavallo for a fascinating study of the ways to knowledge in Ariosto's text as compared to Boiardo's. While she focuses on the character of Rodamonte, she uses Orlando to support her insights, concluding that "Ariosto casts doubt on both the possibility of acquiring knowledge and the positive nature of the outcome once true knowledge is acquired" (314). I agree with Cavallo's reading that, for Ariosto, knowledge holds the potential for great danger (315). Cavallo's conclusion seems more bleak than mine, however: "In Ariosto's fictional world, not only does false opinion masquerade as knowledge, but even in cases in which objective knowledge is possible, it is not necessarily desirable" (317), and illusion may be preferable.
epic embody the danger inherent in the workings of the imagination and in the fragility of the human being’s self-identity. The *Furioso* is flush with Ariosto’s references to a schism in the concept of the self, especially connected to the loss of reason. He often refers to the weakness of reason in the face of strong passions.\(^5\) And he couches Orlando’s psychological struggle in words related to self-identity and its loss.\(^6\) The poet even foreshadows Orlando’s metaphorical death through madness when he describes him as lost in a forest. The narrator explains that Orlando had wandered from the trail, “come era uscito di se stesso” (“just as he had strayed from his true self”; 12.86).

As far back as Boiardo’s *Innamorato*, Orlando’s identity as a character was based on the figure of the *stilnovista* lover, characterized by his desire for Angelica and the heavenly perfection that her form represents. When Angelica chooses her own path and announces her consummated human passion to the world, she forces an end to Orlando’s idealized quest. This disrupts Orlando’s constructed literary identity. When Orlando rebels against the truth of her choice he is battling for his own survival. His resistance persists throughout the *Furioso* until the very centre of the poem, with his dramatic metamorphosis into a destructive madness precipitated by the shattering of his illusions.

\(^5\) When Ruggiero loses the hippocyroph while attempting to rape Angelica, the narrator states, “raro è però che di ragione il morso / libidinosa furia a dietro volga, / quando il piacere ha in pronto” (“Seldom, however, will the bridle of Reason check rabid Lust once it scents its quarry”; 11.1). Another example of the relationship between reason and desire is given when Bradamante laments Ruggiero’s supposed infidelity in canto 32. Recalling Ovid’s Icarus and Medea, Bradamante says that through her irrational desire she flew to great heights and then fell, wings singed; and she blames herself for allowing desire into her breast, for it “cacciata ha la ragion di seggio, / [. . .] / Quel mi trasporta ognor di male in peggio, / né lo posso frenar, che non ha freno” (“has driven reason from its seat [. . .] It keeps transporting me from bad to worse, but I cannot rein it in for it has no rein”; 22). De Panizza Lorch believes that in the first half of the poem, reason “plays a limited role in Ariosto’s ethical concept” and that Ariosto takes “a quizzical attitude towards reason as the principle of order in the world of passions” (8-10).

\(^6\) Ascoli reads the *Furioso* as the embodiment of two contradictory concepts: the Neoplatonic educational voyage which leads to forgetfulness in God, and so to a disconnection from history and civic duty; and as the civic humanist idea of education that creates a link between individual and community. For Ascoli, this leads to a paradox of identity and loss of self (35). Mazzotta sees Orlando’s recognition of his exclusion from Angelica’s happiness as a sign of the limitations of the powers of the self (“Power”, 192).
When Orlando's crafted self-identity dies completely, his "gran follia" ("great madness"; 23.133) begins, transforming him into a body possessed purely by fury and hatred. The new Orlando personifies the Renaissance madman in the extreme. He rages naked through the countryside, uprooting trees with superhuman strength and slaughtering with his bare hands any who cross his path. His use of language is minimized, his only full sentences being absurd demands for a horse—a parody of rational discussion which emphasizes the hero's derangement. Orlando has become a man whose agony "fuor del senno al fin l'ebbe condotto" ("drove him out of his mind"; 23.132); he is without reason, self-control, or the capacity for imagination. Orlando's destruction, born of despair, is without goal because he is incapable of directing its power; he is now separated from his own reason, literally and figuratively. Orlando is no longer himself.

Throughout the Furioso Ariosto makes references to self-awareness and its absence when discussing the passions of many characters aside from Orlando, and also in the narrator himself. This correlation between love and madness as a loss of self, or separation from self and from reason, is a recurring theme. Similar language can be found, for example, in the tales of Rodomonte and Bradamante that detail their responses to the experience of betrayal. In canto 34, Bradamante declares that her "desire irrazionale" ("unreasoning desire"; 22.2) "cacciata ha la ragion di seggio" ("has driven reason from its seat"; 22.3). Later she is described as consumed by furious rage (32.35 and 32.44). In similar circumstances, Rodomonte "da se stesso era diviso" ("was not himself"; 27.131)—note the use of "diviso" ("divided") in the original. Illustrations of his behaviour include references to his fury and burning rage (28.102 and 27.116). The nature of love's madness is explicit in the narrator's commentary, placed immediately after Orlando has lost his mind. The narrator exclaims:

che non è in somma amor, se non insania,
da giudizio de' savi universale:

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e se ben Orlando ognun non smania, 
suo fuor mostra a qualch’altro segnale.  
E quale è di pazzia segno più espresso  
che, per altri voler, perder se stesso? (24.1)

([...] love, in the universal opinion of wise men, is nothing but madness. Though not everyone goes raving mad like Orlando, Love’s folly shows itself in other ways; what clearer sign of lunacy than to lose your own self through pining for another?)

Later, in the Introduction to canto 30, the narrator again laments the effects of love, stating: “Non men son fuor di me, che fosse Orlando” (“I am no less divorced from myself than was Orlando”; 4). This idea of the intelligent scholar (both narrator and Orlando—who was highly educated and multi-lingual) being overcome by passion that leads to overwhelming melancholy and eventually madness and loss of the self, is not new. It is characteristic of a text of the other Renaissance scholar I mentioned above—Marsilio Ficino.

Ficino made the works of Plato and Plotinus, as well as other Greek writers, available to his contemporaries by translating them into Latin and commenting upon them. He was also deeply interested in Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas on the flight of the soul, as evident in his *Theologia Platonica*. His own philosophical thinking is indicative of his formal stance on the imagination, poetic madness and creativity. An even more fascinating example of his thinking on madness and imaginative intelligence is to be found in his *De vita libri tres* (also known as *Libri de vita triplici*). This text, addressed to the scholar and creative thinker, is a practical guide to life and work. It moves away from Platonic idealism and towards the very real concern of maintaining the health of the human body so that its owner can live a long and productive life. This text contains those same elements we see in the episode of Orlando’s madness and in the poet’s ironic references to his own love-sickness: the relationship between the imagination and sadness, *fuor*, madness and poetry.10

9In his “Commentarium in *Phaedrum*” Ficino discusses poetic madness, ranking the four *fuores* of prophecy (linked to knowledge), the hieratic art (linked to the will), poetry (linked to hearing) and love (linked to sight), any of which can be released as poetic madness in the form of poems or songs (*Phaedran Charioteer*, 78-84 and 98-100). In Ficino’s “De Amore,” poetic madness is beneficial for it arouses the soul and soothes it with its musical sound, bringing its parts into harmony. Poetic madness also works with the other madnesses to bring the entire soul into a unity and to rise to God (*Phaedran Charioteer*, 224).

10Several terms refer to the imagination and creativity in Ficino’s *De vita*. In bk. 2, ch. 15 *imaginatio* is listed among the five pleasures as a positive faculty, but
The *De vita* is a text that seeks to answer the question that is at the centre of all existence: how can we make our lives perfect? Within this context, Ficino expressly links the intellectual greatness of both poets and critics using madness and “black bile,” or melancholy, as their common foundation, with melancholy also posited as the facilitator of creative genius.\(^1\) These links between melancholy and creativity are strengthened by Ficino’s further description of *furor* or madness. In the *De vita* Ficino defines it as stemming from the type of melancholy or black bile which, kindling and burning, puts people in an excited and frenzied state (*Three Books on Life*, 117). From the title of Ariosto’s text, we know that Orlando is *furioso*, semantically linking him to the concept of the poet and to the creative inspiration discussed in Ficino’s text. Ficino also refers to divine inspiration and prophecy when he explains how black bile leads to creativity in thinkers:

Hinc philosophi singulares euadunt, prae- serit cum animus sic ab exter- nis motibus atque corpore proprio seuocatus, et quam proximus diuinis, diuinorum instrumentum efficiatur. Vnde diuinis influxibus oraculisque ex alto repletus, noua quaedam inusitatâque semper excogitat, et futura praedicit. (8; bk. 1, ch. 6)

(From this [black bile’s ability to draw the soul into contemplation] come original philosophers, especially when their soul, hereby called away from external movements and from its own body, is made in the highest degree both a neighbor to the divine and an instrument of the divine. As

the term was not equivalent to our conception of “creative” or “poetic” imagination. Dante used the term *ingegno* in relation to the creative imagination, and Ficino uses the term *ingenium* repeatedly in the *De vita*, occasionally in its general sense, as “natural bent,” but more often as the mental ability that can gather images and recombine them into new forms—basically, as the formative step of the creative imagination. *Ingenium*, similar to our English terms “ingenuity” and “genius,” can be seen as a combination of both imagination and invention.

The contexts in which it is used link it to the creative and poetic imagination.\(^1\) Klubansky, Panofsky and Saxl state that Ficino was the first to connect the melancholy of the intellectual with Plato’s divine fury (259). Also, as observed by Kaske and Clark, although in *De vita* Ficino cites Plato, Democritus and Aristotle as asserting unhesitatingly that “melancholicos nonnullos interdum adeò ingenio cunctos excellere, ut non humani, sed diuini potius videantur” (6; bk. 1, ch. 5), “not a few melancholics so excel everyone in ingenio that they seem to be not human but rather divine” 117); neither Plato nor Democritus link seeming divinity to melancholy, and pseudo-Aristotle does it without stressing divinity (Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, 413). Latin quotations from Ficino’s *De vita* are from the 1598 edition, while quotations in English are from the 1989 translation by Kaske and Clark (*Three Books on Life*).
a result, it is filled from above with divine influences and oracles, and it always invents new and unaccustomed things and predicts the future.) (121-123)

Thus for Ficino, the creative individual (or scholar12), by definition subject to melancholy, is also subject both to furor and to a separation within the self. For the Furioso, Ariosto and his narrator persona are examples of this, as is the educated Orlando, who also was the recipient of a prophetic dream.13 But although Ficino makes a connection between black bile and divinely inspired creation, he also emphasizes melancholy’s risks to the mind and body themselves:

Verum missa haec tanquam leiiora iam faciamus, atque ad id quod periculosissimum est, recuerdamur, ad atram bilem, scilicet qua, quoties abun[...]et furit, cum corpus totum tum uel maxime spiritum, quasi quoddam instrumentum ingenii, ipsumque ingenium et judicium labefactat. (16; bk. 1, ch. 18)

(Let us pass over these former things as less important, however, and return to that most dangerous thing, black bile, which as often as it becomes excessive and rages, disturbs not only the whole body but especially also the spirit—which is, as it were, an instrument of the intelligence—as well as the intelligence itself and the judgment.) (147)

To minimize this danger, Ficino advocates managing bile through lifestyle changes so as to keep its quantity and effects in moderation.14 Ficino’s melancholy also binds poetry’s divine fury to the madness of the lover. Venus endangers the creative thinker, for the lover is distracted by

12In the De vita Ficino explicitly links critics with poets through melancholy; see, in particular, bk. 1, ch. 5.
13See Boillet for a reading of the characteristics of this dream and its relationship to similar dreams in other texts.
14"Oportet autem atram bilem neque tam paucam esse, ut sanguis, bilis, spiritus quasi franeo careant: unde instabile ingenium labilemque memoriam esse contingat: Neque tam multam, ut nimio pondere praegrauiti dormitare atque eger calcaribus uideamur" (6; bk. 1, ch. 5; “But the black bile should not be so small in quantity, that blood, bile, and spirit, as it were, lack a rein, from which will arise an unstable wit and a short memory; it should not be so great in quantity that, burdened with too much weight, we seem to sleep and to need spurs”; 119).X. Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl state that “Only the humanism of the Italian Renaissance was able to recognise [...] in the melancholic this polarity” (247), which, while making melancholy a sign of greatness, also colored the optimistic view of life with tragedy.
external pleasure and unable to think clearly. From these paragraphs alone, we see that although Ficino deals with melancholy as a natural aspect essential to creativity, he alternates between portraying it in a positive light, as the way to genius, and a very negative one, as the “monster” that must be suppressed in order for the individual to thrive. It can also be a negative by-product of scholarly activity, as are headaches and poor eyesight. Nonetheless, despite its negative aspects, the stimulation of the creative genius requires the presence of black bile. This duality surrounding the effects of melancholy is intricately linked to the ambiguity felt towards the creative imagination.

Like Ficino, Ariosto, too, acknowledges the humanity of the intellectual, and the fact that melancholy and madness can accompany thought. He, too, realizes that all of these factors are inescapable parts of the human being, and that destruction hides just beneath the surface, needing to be understood in order to be controlled. This is clear when Ariosto’s narrator, in response to the accusation that he is being hypocritical for warning against love, again connects loss of reason to love:

Io vi rispondo che comprendo assai,
or che di mente ho lucido intervallo;
ed ho gran cura (e spero di farlo ormai)
di riposarmi e d’uscir fuor di ballo;
ma tosto far, come vorrei, nol posso;
che ’l male è penetrato infin all’osso. (24.3)

(The answer is that now, in an interval of lucidity, I understand a great deal. And I am taking pains (with imminent success, I hope) to find peace and withdraw from the dance—though I cannot do so as quickly as I should wish, for the disease has eaten me to the bone.)

Ariosto’s reference to his “illness” recalls the way in which Ficino’s text had grounded the imagination into the human realm. The De vita is geared towards the alleviation of genius’ negative effects, especially that of black bile, in order that melancholic, yet simultaneously gifted sufferers may learn to thrive despite their natural human limitations. Ficino leads us repeatedly to the important conclusion that one must know oneself in order to remain in balance and live to the fullest, stating “Vnusquisq[ue]

15“Quamobrem nihil contemplATORI vel curioso pestilentius, quàm uenererus actus, nihil uicissim hunc sectanti alienius quàm cura et contemplatio esse potest” (40; bk. 2, ch. 16; “For this reason nothing can be more noxious to the contemplator or the investigator than the Venereal act; nothing more alien, in turn, to those pursuing the latter, than care and contemplation”; 215-217).
igitur se cognoscat, suiq[ue] ipsius moderator ac medicus esto” (40; bk. 2, ch. 16) “Therefore let everyone know himself; each of you be the ruler and doctor of himself” (217). We must know our weaknesses and strengths, our “natural bent.”¹⁶ This notion of reaching knowledge by first looking into and knowing oneself is reiterated throughout the De vita. And it is this aspect of Ficino’s thought that figures most prominently in Ariosto’s epic. Ariosto also realizes that lapses of reason are expected—as advocated by Ficino, we must educate ourselves to learn how to minimize the damage when the faculties are out of balance and black bile takes control.

It is clear that Orlando did not know himself in the first part of the Furioso. It appears that the great Platonic themes of love, beauty and goodness have destroyed him. In love, he has lost himself in the pursuit of the other, and now his black bile has overtaken him entirely as he rages uncontrollably, his body on earth and his rational senses completely absent. He is beyond being able to save himself. At this point the ultimate demonstration of his incapacity for both knowledge and imagination is the fact that he has also lost his memory, the starting point for all Platonic voyages of discovery. Mad Orlando fails to recognize even Angelica, the former object of his love, for all recollection of her was destroyed (29. 61).

The crazed Orlando dragging horses to pieces is a mirror image of the paladin Astolfo, who rides to the heavens on a great flying creature of the imagination. Astolfo, who represents an alternative relationship between imagination and knowledge, salvages Orlando’s senses and returns him to the battle. In the process, the reader discovers that Orlando’s separation from himself was both literal and humorous—he has no brains (29.52) because his brains lie on the moon, the storehouse for lost things.

Significantly, the character that rescues Orlando is also one who is familiar with both love’s delusion and the voyage of education, knowledge and self-discovery. Like Orlando, Astolfo was a lover who had lived enthralled by superficial beauty. He had fallen prey to the aged sorceress Alcina, who entraps men with a false image of youthful idealized beauty. Astolfo thus appears in the Furioso as a former lover, and as one who has already been punished and has learned his lesson. He begins his storyline

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¹⁶The importance of this is illustrated by chapter-heading 23 in Book 3: “Vt prosperè uiuas agásque, imprinis cognosce ingenium, sidus, Genium tuum, et locum eisde[m] conueniente[m]: hic habita, professione[m] sequere naturale[m].” (“To Live Well and Prosper, First Know Your Natural Bent, Your Star, Your Genius, and the Place Suitable to These; Here Live. Follow Your Natural Profession”; 371). Note the terms ingenium, used in this passage as “natural bent,” and genium, which is linked to ingenuity.
as a Virgilian and Dantesque myrtle on Alcina’s island. When Astolfo leaves his arboreal body and recovers his human form he also leaves the passion for human beauty behind, at least for the duration of the *Furioso*. Astolfo first appears in the *Furioso* when he departs from the level at which Orlando remains for the first half of the poem as he searches for his beloved Angelica.

Astolfo has another enlightening experience when, after being freed, he visits Logistilla’s domain. Logistilla, the daughter of Love, is understood by most critics to represent reason, a connection evoked also by her name. Logistilla in fact embodies both the ideas expressed by Landino on the pleasure of beauty leading to education as well as an important aspect of Ficino’s philosophy on contemplation. The language Ariosto chooses to describe Logistilla’s domain makes the connection to Neoplatonic ideas unmistakable. Through her beauty and virtuosity, Logistilla at first inspires reverence, so that the viewer continues to contemplate her presence (10.46). The love she embodies is unique, for in it, “il desiderio più non chiede, / e contento riman come la vede” (“desire craves no more, but rests content on sight of her”; 10.46). Logistilla teaches how “i pensier tuoi meglio formati / poggin piu ad alto [. . .] / e come la gloria de’ beati / nel mortal corpo parte si delibii” (“your mind, better informed, can soar to the heights, [. . .] and how the glory of the blessed can in part permeate the bodies of mortals”; 10.47).

Astolfo and Logistilla highlight the concepts of beauty, contemplation, poetic imagination and knowledge, and all of these play a role in Ficino and Landino’s philosophies. For Landino, the thinker is educated by exploring the encyclopaedic form of poetry, which is the means to recall to memory a distant world and the Neoplatonic search for all knowledge. He emphasizes the ability of the poetic imagination to lead away from the human world, and he also underscores the importance of such distance in the search for knowledge. Landino’s space is distance: one looks outside the self to poetry in order to move beyond this world. Ficino, on the other hand, transforms the distance of Landino’s poetic imagination by linking creativity to melancholy, which brings poetry into the domain of Saturn, the planet of contemplation. Varro described how “contemplation” comes from *templum*, the space marked off by the seer (7.6-9). The melancholy of Saturn, or Chronos, enables genius to be tied to time. With Saturn’s time, space results in distance. Poetry, as the art involving both rhetoric and time, is intimately bound up with memory, which itself is traditionally the eye of the imagination. For Ficino, time and recollection forge an internal bond, for contemplation is the way to self-knowledge. Seekers of
knowledge collect and look into themselves, distancing themselves from the external world in the closed-off space of the imagination. Ficino refers to the traditional idea of contemplation as a way to reach truth, but it is contained in the idea that it is the centre of the self that must be analyzed. With the contemplation of the inner self, one can then move to the analogous higher realms.

Ficino stresses the importance of gaining knowledge through looking inwardly and knowing oneself, and this is an important aspect of Logistilla’s education. Logistilla’s palace is filled with jewels that reflect every virtue and vice of the person who looks into them. Here, “l’uom sin in mezzo all’anima si vede [e] fassi, mirando allo specchio lucente / se stesso, conoscendosi, prudente” (“a man sees right into his own soul [and] looking into these bright mirrors, he discovers himself, and learns wisdom”; 10.59). Orlando, the man who is the most alienated from his true self than any in the poem, never meets with Logistilla.

It has been said that Ariosto uses Logistilla’s realm to demonstrate that reason fails in its education. One proof for this is the example of Ruggiero himself, the most prominent failure of one of Logistilla’s pupils. However, Astolfo is also educated by Logistilla, and this obtains positive results. It is here that Astolfo gains enough knowledge to control the winged hippogryph with which Astolfo and his imagination are able to take flight.

Some critics posit Logistilla’s education as unsuccessful in the *Furioso* because, despite her contentment, goodness and beauty, her visitors soon wish to leave. Kisacky interprets this to mean that for Ariosto people are “not ready for a life of reason and self-control” (112). Although this is in part valid, if we re-examine Ficino we can find another explanation. Even as love could bring danger to the thinker by hindering contemplation, contemplation itself holds certain risks. Ficino’s contemplative distance is created by moving into the inner self rather than towards the other world—and such distance is also critically dangerous. This risk is clearly demonstrated when Ficino refers to the “human” causes of divine contemplation. Ficino sees melancholy as the soil from which the search for knowledge is born. There, especially in the contemplation of philosophy,

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17See Carruthers for a comprehensive discussion of memory, its function in medieval thought, and its relationship to the creative arts.
18Marinelli reads Logistilla’s failure as deriving from the incapacity of human beings to use reason, which is a “flighty” and “volatile possession” (145-146).
19Ficino describes physical love and contemplation on opposite poles as dangerous in excess. In the *De vita* book 2, chapter 16 he writes: “ex opposito Venus atque Saturnus spiritus nostri volatui auceptantur” (40; “from opposite sides Venus and Saturn ensnare the flight of our spirit”; 215).
the mind is working so hard to apply itself to incorporeal truth that it may seem to separate from, or “fly out of” the body; a process which may destroy the body itself. 20 While this separation leads to vision, Ficino appreciates the risk inherent in withdrawal from the outer world. Therefore, the Ficinian contemplation Logistilla incites can be endured only for so long, and then the thinker must move on, using the knowledge he has gained to its best potential and applying it to life. Indeed, Logistilla’s visitors are inspired to continue to seek out knowledge, for both Ruggiero and Astolfo, once they are able to fly, decide to travel around the world.

Although Ficino and Landino follow opposite approaches in their search for knowledge, they both believe that the creative imagination can lead to truth. Their common ground is the Platonic concept that the individual and the cosmos are mutually interconnected. 21 Astolfo uses his knowledge of himself to control his passions, making contemplation’s link between the individual and the cosmos literal as he flies over the world and eventually to the moon. Through Astolfo’s balanced love of knowledge and its resulting flight, we will be able to examine what Ariosto says about poetry and the world of knowledge from that distant vantage point.

When Astolfo learns to control the hippocryph, the type of imagination he represents is evident—he is the embodiment of the poetic imagination, as is the creature he rides on his journeys. 22 Ariosto supports this idea with language linking Astolfo’s flight to the control of his own poetic creation. 23 Ariosto’s hippocryph is an original creation not found in the

20 Ficino refers to Plato’s Timaeus as saying that “animum diuina saepissimè et intentissimè contemplantuem, alimentis eiusmodi adeò adolescere potentémque cuadere, ut corpus suum suprà quàm natura corporis patiatur exuperet: ipsumq[ue] uhementioribus agitationibus suis aliquando uel effugiat quod ammodo, uel nonnullùm quasi dissolvere uideatur” (5; bk. 1, ch. 4; “the soul contemplating divine things assiduously and intently grows up so much on food of this kind and becomes so powerful, that it overreaches its body above what the corporeal nature can endure; and sometimes in its too vehement agitation, it either in a way flies out of it or sometimes seems as if to disintegrate it”: 115).

21 Ficino, in his explanation of melancholy, binds the human with the divine, with bile as the point where the elements meet. In book 13 of the Theologia Platonica, human beings are also the link between heaven and earth.

22 Giamatti describes Astolfo as the poet’s image; a supreme ironist and commentator on the poem and art itself (140). Marinelli states that, as a “surrogate” for the poet, Astolfo alone shares his perspective (10). Mazzotta sees the voyage of Astolfo on the hippocryph as the “freedom of the esthetic imagination” (“Power,” 196).

23 Two examples: “chi l’ale al verso presterà, che vole / tanto ch’arrivi all’alto mio concetto?” (“Who will lend wings to my verses that they may soar up to the height of my theme?” 3/1); “Resti con lo scrittor de l’evangelo / Astolfo ormai,
**Innamorato.** The creature is a microcosm of the poem: a composite of a variety of elements taken from both the physical world and a rich storehouse of literary images to which the poet makes his own unique additions. Like poetry, the hippocryph carries its rider to any number of worlds, visible and invisible, “real” and marvellous. It moves in concert with the imaginative workings of the text and marks out the space of the poem. Ariosto’s deliberate delay in providing the reader with a full description of the animal (a process that takes the first four cantos of the text) makes the unveiling of the beast, never before encountered in literature, still more climactic. This emphasis on the hippocryph and the creative imagination serves to underline the imaginative basis of love and desire in this text.

Once Astolfo decides to ride the hippocryph, he embodies the creative genius at work as he combines elements from several bridles in order to shape one that can best control the beast (22.28). Astolfo has learned his lessons at Logistilla’s so well that he can create his own bridle for the hippocryph. Orlando, on the other hand, never experiences the flight of the hippocryph. Orlando’s primary role in the Furioso is as a character divided from himself, losing his reason due to the overwhelming force of passion, madness, and melancholy’s black bile. And for most of the story, Astolfo has something that Orlando does not: reason’s self-knowledge. Prepared properly, Astolfo can wield the power of the imagination, which he uses to embark upon a voyage of discovery. Astolfo and the hippocryph embody the imagination’s connection with the desire for knowledge.

Astolfo’s adventures are a fantastic ironic gloss over the great literary traditions of the past. He even mimics Dante’s voyage towards knowledge in an abbreviated whirlwind tour through Hell and up to Earthly Paradise. It is here, while enjoying its delicious fruits, that Astolfo is told by John the

ch’io voglio far un salto, / quanto sia in terra a venir fin dal cielo; / ch’io non posso più star su l’ali in alto” (“let us leave Astolfo with the Gospel-maker, for I want to leap the distance between heaven and earth—my wings can no longer support me at such heights”; 35.31).

24Looney sees Ovid as Ariosto’s model for the “fusion of classical epic and romance” (97). The hippocryph is also seen as the juxtaposition of nature and art, representing the poet as imitator and inventor (Jossa, 10). Ascoli observes that the hippocryph’s fusion of myth and reality “forces the question of the relation between reality and imagination, nature and artefact” (248). Others have also concluded that the hippocryph symbolizes creative imagination. Kisacky highlights the connection with Pegasus, symbol of poetic inspiration, and interprets the hippocryph’s flight as representing the panoramic vision of the poet; she also notes that the characters who fully control the beast are creative ones (70-97).
Evangelist that he has been chosen to rescue Orlando from his madness. It is clear from the overall structure as well as the small details of these scenes that this voyage is a parody, and not a true spiritual journey as had been the case with its source.

Ariosto expands on the literary traditions of the past to create a lunar episode that is fascinating and ambiguous, while also infused with humour. Astolfo’s urge to explore the moon is laced with Platonic terminology. The ascent is because his “desir che di veder lo ‘ncalza, / ch’al cielo aspira, e la terra non stima” (“urge to explore directed his aspirations heavenwards, spurning the earth”; 34.48), and we again hear the echoes of Plato as he flies towards the peak:

[. . .] quindi il bel paese ammira;
e giudica, appo quel, brutto e malvagio,
e che sia al ciel ed a natura in ira
questo ch’abitian noi fetito mondo:
tanto è soave quel, chiro e giocondo. (34.52)

([. . .] as he compared what he saw with this rank world we live in, he dismissed our world as ugly and evil and loathed by Heaven and nature in comparison.”)

The spiritual atmosphere is enhanced by the introduction of St. John in the earthly paradise. St. John states that Astolfo was chosen to restore the wits of Orlando, who had been deliberately made to lose them by God. Again, there is reference to the lover Orlando having lost himself in another, for God “l’intelletto si gli offusca e tolle, / che non può altrui conoscere, e sé manco” (“so clouded [Orlando’s] reason that he cannot recognize anyone, still less himself”; 34.65).

According to St. John, God had inspired Astolfo’s desire to travel and has assisted him in coming to the moon with the gifts of the horn and the beast of the imagination. Like Landino’s poet, Astolfo is portrayed as divinely inspired to create and to soar to great heights, bringing home a divine message hidden beneath beauty and education. However, despite this noble mission, and the build-up of the text along Platonic and Neoplatonic lines, first-time readers of the Furioso might be surprised to find their expectations of a spiritual voyage ending in the bizarre lunar setting Ariosto depicts.

When Astolfo reaches the wondrous moon, he finds vast allegorical mounds of items lost from the Earth below. St. John spells out the hidden allegory of each heap for both traveller and reader, who are not expected to be able to interpret the meaning on their own. This is a subversion of Landino’s ornate veil representing the educational nature of poetry, for the reader does not need to use his/her own reason to burrow beneath the
beauty on the surface. The biggest heap on the moon contains brains, which are gaseous and stored in vials. This mound is so extremely large because human beings are more prone to lose their reason than anything else, and this is also why folly ("pazzia") is the one thing that stays permanently on the earth. "Love" figures prominently in the list of things cited by St. John that cause one to lose one's wits. As in Ficino's De vita, the pursuit of physical love results in a movement away from the self. Ariosto takes this opportunity to make an ironic comment through the mouth of St. John, who states that there were many brains lost by sophists, astrologers, and poets (34.85). Astolfo finds (and inhales) some of his own lost brains, and locates Orlando's brains, clearly labeled and stored in the largest vial.

Ariosto's treatment of the moon can be read as collapsing the characteristic vertical direction of the epic. The attempt to escape to the moon as a way of transcending human action is a dead-end voyage, as the moon turns out to be far from the shining and mystical place imagined. The moon has even been read as a "repository not of meaning but of unmeaning" (Quint, 398). This demonstrates that the Earth and moon are actually interchangeable. We can travel to "heaven" and "heaven" can come to us, just as each globe mirrors the other in their interconnectedness. Despite this passage's religious imagery, no divine truth is discovered. The moon is not a higher plane, but reflects instead the disconnection within the human being, the separation of the mind and the body that occurs when one loses oneself in the pursuit and the image of the other.

It is here, in a part of the epic focused on the voyage of knowledge and the danger of the imagination, that Ariosto situates a discussion of the poetic imagination. St. John clarifies for Astolfo a scene they are witnessing on the moon: the allegorical portrayal of human lives lost in the river of oblivion by time. Only the poets, represented by a pair of swans, are able to salvage some of the names of the deceased, which are then permanently enshrined. St. John interprets the scene as a demonstration of the correspondence of earth and moon, with the moon reflecting the divinity of earthly immortality. Despite this explanation, what the moon reflects is not spiritual, but worldly; the immortality of fame.

St. John then addresses poetry itself, setting his monologue in the con-

25 See Bàberi Squarotti for a very different interpretation of the moon; he describes it as a "utopia," and "l'altro mondo, quello vero," because there is no folly there (100-106).

26 MacPhail sees this passage as Ariosto endorsing the topos of poetic fame and sanctioning its prophecies because they are not subject to providence or other transcendent influences (43).
text of the struggle between patron and poet. St. John praises poets for immortalizing the worthy, but the majority of his speech is a bitter warning directed towards patrons. Poets are “i sacri ingegni” (“the heaven-sent geniuses”) and stingy patrons deserve oblivion, for friendship with poets would have saved them from Lethe’s waters (35.22). St. John later observes that he, too, is a writer (hence his empathy), and has been rewarded for praising Christ with the great fortune that cannot be erased by time or death (35.29). Given the context, and despite the spiritual significance of this character, this reward can be read as immortality through fame. In this passage, St. John also makes it clear that all manner of patrons can benefit from being friendly to poets, for through poetry even the disgraceful can be glorified. Appropriately, given the structure of the Furioso itself, St. John cites examples from epic literature. In this famous and much-debated passage, St. John states that “Non si pietoso Enea, né forte Achille / fu, come è fama, né si fiero Ettorre” (“Aeneas was not as devoted, nor Achilles as strong, nor Hector as ferocious as their reputations suggest”; 35.25), but they achieved fame because their descendants gave lavish rewards to writers. St. John’s examples seem to place literature as the opposite of history—he says of Homer’s victorious Agamemnon and Penelope’s faithfulness, “se tu vuoi che ‘l ver non ti sia ascoso, / tutta al contrario l’istoria converti: / che i Greci rotti, e che Troia vittrice, / e che Penelopea fu meretrice” (“if you want to know what really happened, invert the story: Greece was vanquished, Troy triumphant, and Penelope a whore”; 35.27).

St. John’s monologue is preceded by praise of Ariosto’s patron, juxtaposed with the lunar mound of burst crickets that represent, no less, poetry in praise of patrons. This representation of poetry may be a satirical commentary on the poet/patron relationship while Ariosto’s words, softened by humour, aim to persuade his own patron to be generous to him. But this passage also brings us face to face with the question of the value of language—do the signs on the earth used by poets lead us to a higher truth? Or do the poets “lie” without a higher purpose? These issues lie at the heart of both the Furioso and the life of its creator.

On the moon, Ariosto connects poets to the earth by linking poetry and history. Many read St. John’s diatribe as stating that poetry lies, subverting history and the value of literature itself.27 I would argue that Ariosto

27 Guidi states that in the Furioso poetry is no longer a servant to history but a maker of myths (70). Ascoli reads this passage as bringing the level of the Bible down to that of poetic lies (288). For Quint, finding meaning in the world itself is not possible when the text, the instrument of meaning, points only to the “higher truth” that poets lie (407).
is demonstrating the fact that poetry can create its own history. The ancient heroes are such because of the poet, and the original reality no longer matters. Poetry creates reality and shapes the world.

Paradoxically, however, it is also true that Ariosto is constantly reminding us of poetry's fictionality and telling us to explore beneath the veil. Routinely, the narrator interjects to assert the truthfulness of some character or event in his text, most often when presenting us with scenes that exceed the bounds of credibility. By insisting on his truthfulness from the position of all-knowing author, or as eyewitness, Ariosto is deliberately drawing our attention to the fictional nature of such characters or scenes and, therefore, of the text as a whole. This technique adds to the humour of the text while simultaneously warning readers to be conscious of what they are reading. The emphasis here, it would seem, is on the voyage to knowledge itself; the exploration and the need to be aware of the dangers involved with the creative imagination.

The questions of poetic language and its relationship to truth again recall Landino and his discussion of Dante's *Commedia*. Ariosto evokes Dante's ideas on language that converge in the figure of Ulysses in *Inferno* 26 by including a Homeric reference in the centre of his discussion on poetry. Ariosto also brings his characters to the moon in the chariot of Elijah, which figures in Dante's passage. St. John's eyes, "flame-like" during his monologue, recall the tongues of flame enveloping Ulysses that illustrated the deceptive potential of language. Dante had also called attention to the need to restrain his own *ingegno* in recognition of Ulysses' tragic demise (*Inf*. 26.21).

In this passage, however, Ariosto is not recalling only Dante; he is also evoking Landino, the Dante scholar. Landino was a great proponent of the idea of the divinely inspired poet, as was Ficino in his more formal philosophical discussions. Landino pushes Dante's notion of transcendent poet-

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28 See especially the introductory passage to canto 7.
29 I agree with Giannetti Ruggiero's view of the reader's relationship to the text; she writes of Orlando's refusal to interpret the linguistic signs pointing to Angelica's loss as "un esempio dell'errore in cui i lettori dell' *Orlando furioso* sono invitati a non cadere: quello di leggere l'istoria del poema senza adeguatamente interpretarla" (169). She reads Ariosto's text as an invitation to interpretation, rather than embodying one underlying truth. Carroll, also, uses the moon scene to posit Ariosto's irony as a criticism not of all literature, but of overly literal interpretations of texts (190-192).
30 See Mazzotta for more on Ulysses and language; he explains that for Dante, Ulysses, the figure of rhetoric, was dangerously able, like rhetoric itself, to manipulate ethics (*Dante*, 81).
ic vision to its uppermost limits. For Dante and Landino the creative poetic imagination, the link between reason and the passions, is the very foundation of knowledge.\(^{31}\) Dante, like Ariosto, played upon the ambivalent core nature of the imagination. He presented the imagination as the means to the highest of goals, while also acknowledging its perils and its apparently irreconcilable double nature. Landino, instead, does not dwell on the dangerous side of the imagination. For him, there is an ethics of the creative imagination, as is apparent in his commentary on Ulysses' "folle volo," where he notes Ulysses' artifice and his consequent condemnation to Hell in the circle of fraud (130). It is wrong, however, to assume that simply because Landino is aware of rhetoric's ability to lead astray, this also means that he is portraying the poetic imagination as doing the same.

Landino makes it quite clear that rhetoric is not to be confused as being the equivalent of poetry. For Landino, poetry is an encyclopaedic form of the creative imagination; it is higher than, and encompasses all the other "human" arts. Although Landino is forced to admit that artifice does exist, he is very reluctant to condemn the fraudulent side of the imagination when it is involved in the poetic process. Landino's insistent idea that "poemi non sono invenzione di filosofi, ma sono doni di Dio" ("poems are not philosophers' inventions, but gifts from God")\(^{32}\) permits the poet to move beyond the rules established by human reason. The creative imagination, in poetic form, is capable of transcendent vision. For Landino, Ulysses' voyage fails because he has no poetic vision. He attempts to reach knowledge—the vision of Purgatory—but he is not capable of finding the hidden truth. He has rhetoric, but he does not have the divine gift of poetry. He moves beyond the limits of his inborn ingegno and so fails in his quest.

In his ethics of the creative imagination, Landino reiterates the primacy of the search for knowledge. Ingegno not only prefigures, but shapes the voyage itself, leading the traveller into a realm of seeing beyond rational capabilities. In a person possessing genius the love of knowledge is stronger

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\(^{31}\) This idea in Dante of poetry as the path to knowledge is explained in Mazzotta, Dante's Vision. See in particular pp. 33 and 116-173 for discussions on the primacy of the imagination and vision, which enable the poet to be central in shaping knowledge.

\(^{32}\) Scritti, 1:142. Landino reiterates this in the Prolusione Dantesca: "Avete veduto che cosa sia poesia e come non da mortale ingegno, ma da divino furore ne l'umane menti infuso orgine trae" ("You have seen what poetry is and how it does not come from mortal ingenuity, but originates from divine fury": Scritti, 1:49:). Although Landino clearly values the creative imagination, he lauds it not as a sign of a unique individual human mind, but as a gift selected and granted solely by God.
than any other love and so, echoing Dante’s words in the *Convivio*, Landino states that “la perfezione dell’animo humano è sapere” (“knowledge is the perfection of the human soul”; 131). For Landino, however, the imagination that is not divinely inspired is limited by personal experience and ability, and this, in turn, limits the voyage towards knowledge.

Ariosto seems to address Landino’s concerns about poetry and divinity by having St. John posit Astolfo’s voyage to the moon, and his desire for knowledge itself, as being inspired by God. Yet, on the moon itself, Ariosto subverts the Neoplatonic notion of the divinity of poetry and knowledge that he has just established, for he grounds the search for knowledge in the earthly goal of fame. Landino had read Ulysses’ failure as representative of the failure to find truth in this mortal life and in the things of this world (*Dante*, 131). For Landino, it was not the voyage of the imagination itself that leads one astray—it was how the creative person employs the will in selecting the direction of its path that leads either to condemnation or to praise.33 Ariosto, however, seems to be advocating the pursuit of fame at any cost.

There are other aspects of Ariosto’s discussion of poetry that recall both Landino and Ficino. Poetic madness and contemplation, like the double flame in *Inferno* 26, illustrate the close connection between rhetoric and prophecy. Landino stresses the divinity of the poet, and Ficino, too, discusses the poet as being divinely inspired. Landino’s and Ficino’s conceptions of the creative imagination can be seen as confronting two alternative ways of seeing: the prophetic and the mystical. The prophet speaks from exile, but the words spoken are directed towards the human world. Divine fury makes Landino’s poet prophetic, for the language of the poetic flight is distant from the human world and surpasses all human arts. But the poet is able to speak to the people and to lead them towards knowledge also through his divine experiences.

Ficino mediates between prophecy and mysticism and collapses their boundaries. In the *Theologia platonica*, he places the poet second after the philosopher among those who separate themselves from their bodies while in this life (bk 13, ch 2). It is contemplation that creates this common activity. Ficino is aware of the mystical aspect of contemplation, but we have seen how he also warns of the dangers of such self-alienation and isolation. In fact, the ineffability of mysticism seems to be what Ficino wish-

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33 According to Landino, Dante wrote the line “Allor mi dolsi” because “conobbi quivi punirsi quelli, che haveano usato la sottigliezza dello ingegno, non in prudentia, ma in fraude, & astutia, con danno del prossimo” (“he knew to punish here those who used the acuity of their minds not for wisdom but for fraud and cunning, harming their neighbors”; *Dante*, 129).
es to avoid: as we have seen in his discussion of contemplation, he often warns of the dangers of separating from the body. If this separation is carried too far, the thinker will lose contact with himself as well as with the human world.

Ficino roots poetic and prophetic divine fury into a medicinal framework, joining the Platonic abstraction to the condition of human flesh and to the madness of the lover. The danger of the boundlessness of the flight of the imagination is not just a philosophical danger, but a physical one as well. While Ficino understands the value of inner contemplation, he is still too closely linked with the human realm and with the process of living to allow the contemplator to disconnect permanently from that world. Nonetheless, the imagination plays a large role in the Neoplatonic searches for knowledge: in Landino's case through poetry, and in Ficino's through contemplation of self. While Landino soars high above the clouds, Ficino must always keep the ground in sight.

Throughout Ariosto's epic we have seen the warnings and demonstrations of the danger of separating from the self, especially through love and its resulting madness and loss of reason. In this regard, Ariosto's poet seems less akin to Landino's divine poet than to the poet tied to the black bile of Ficino's De vita. Like Ficino, Ariosto moves towards a tone of acceptance of the dangers and duality of the imagination. In his Platonic works Ficino emphasizes imagination's negative pole, but still asserts the superiority of philosophy. Ariosto reworks these ideas within his own context and plays upon them, preserving some of their meaning while also parodying them. In the Furioso there is a fundamental sense that poetry has great value, even though its divinity is parodied. But the idea of divinely inspired creativity is downplayed while, instead, the effects of love's passion on the poet are highlighted. In this sense, Ariosto shadows Ficino's genius, for he emphasizes his own humanity. He is aware of the fact that melancholy is a part of the human being and a necessary ingredient in creation.

Ariosto's work takes Landino's assertion that poetry leads to knowledge as a point of departure. But instead of Landino's knowledge of the divine, what is ultimately emphasized in the Furioso is Ficino's concept of the importance of knowing one's human limitations. For Ariosto, Landino's assertion that poetry leads to knowledge is eclipsed by Ficino's concept of the importance of knowledge of the self. Moreover, this self-knowledge, which allows the poet to manage his passions as best he can, leads to greater poetic ability. Like Astolfo, we must come to know ourselves and our

34 Johnson Haddad takes an opposite view, reading this self-knowledge as undermining the poet's confidence in his own creative abilities (224).
weaknesses and approach the search for knowledge from that perspective. For although poetry may lead to truth, the clearest truth Ariosto is celebrating in the Furioso is his very own human poetic skill and his ability to use it to dazzle the reader. The narrator’s self-reflexive comments serve not only to call attention to the fact that we are reading a poem, but also, and more importantly, to call attention to the poet’s creative skill and to his control of the story. While he is professing to be “one of us” by constantly acknowledging his own weakness in the struggle against madness, he is actually placing himself above the text and in control of the reader’s desires and thoughts. While the beauty of the text may spark the reader’s desire to read on, the path has been chosen by Ariosto. The poem resembles Astolfo, soaring above us on the shimmering wings of his creation. But this is not an uncomplicated act. Like Ficino’s poet, as well as his critic, Ariosto’s genius is a struggling, human genius—one who not only knows the depths of suffering and depression, but must also accept that sadness and the downward flight of the imagination as indispensable elements of the genius with which one is gifted.

Through melancholy, the poet and his creation are intimately linked to love’s passion. Ariosto uses this concept to illustrate the close connection between reason and love’s madness not only in human life, but also in the workings of the imagination. He does this in order to place the poetic imagination above all else. Mazzotta successfully posits the perspective of the narrator, who is both inside and outside the work, as demonstrating the poet’s “play of the poetic imagination, whereby the poet confronts and is enmeshed by the ambiguities of all values but transcends them” (“Power,” 197). Both Astolfo and the poet work from a point of relative detachment; for they are able to see themselves and the world as the comedy it really is. Orlando, however, is not a poetic creator but a passive reader and so he plunges into madness because of the shattering of his fictional image through the truth that was contained in the poetry of Medoro.35 Overwhelmed by love’s passion, Orlando suffers from a blind faith in images, which also serves to feed his passion. Then, when he loses the illusion on which his life was based, he suffers a physical and mental separa-

35Mazzotta sees Orlando’s reading of the love poem as a “hermeneutics of the love conventions, the narcissism and evasiveness flanking them” (Cosmopoiesis, 40). Johnson Haddad uses the imagery of Orlando reading the poem to connect him with Medusa, Perseus and Narcissus, representing the dark side of self-confrontation and poetry, for it can lead to creative failure and madness (224). Masciandaro also connects Orlando to Narcissus in that he is unable to accept the fact that Angelica is the other, not shaped by his own image of her (153).
tion, literally losing his reason. As Mazzotta has noted, Orlando’s madness lacks the fluency of language, which needs to be retrieved by the imagination (“Power,” 194). The irony may be that while poetry and the imagination make Orlando insane, his senses are restored thanks to Astolfo’s flight of poetic imagination. What in particular Astolfo brings to Orlando is the ability for a critical reading of creativity and poetry—he should be aware that it is human-made and be able to read beneath its apparent reality.

In the Furioso, the culmination of the themes of reason, love, madness and imagination converge with Astolfo’s restoration of Orlando’s senses. After Orlando reabsorbs his brains, he is “all’esser primo ritornato / [...] più che mai saggio e virile” (“his old self once more, a paragon of wisdom and manliness”; 39.61), and “ne’ suoi bei discorsi l’intelletto / rivenne, più che mai lucido e netto” (“intellect, brighter and more lucid than ever, once more informed his graceful speech”; 39.57). At the same moment, Orlando is also “cured” of his love-sickness—although this is probably not a permanent cure, Astolfo and the narrator will both lose themselves in love again (35.1-2).

The lovers in Ariosto’s world display many conflicting aspects of human nature. The imagination of desire and poetry’s flight demonstrate that when the balance between these faculties is lost, black bile’s melancholy takes over and madness and loss of self results. Paradoxically, melancholy both works through the imagination and depresses its creative workings, which can also lead to madness. This potential for madness, however, is necessary for life, love and poetic creation, so the poet must accept the reality that the passions are part of us and are capable of ruling us. There is a basic dichotomy underlying the Furioso; as in Ficino’s text, you cannot remove the passions from the self, but the hope is that through reason you may also come to know yourself and so be capable of checking passion’s destructive power. While love and the imagination drive the poem and Orlando, and, ultimately, lead to the demise of both, it is the imagination and love that also shape them and give them life. And it is the collapse or the deliberate discarding of desire that ends the imaginative movement of the poem. The paradox is that if passion and the potential for madness are eliminated, art also fades: after Orlando renounces love and Astolfo frees the hippogryph, the poem’s flight soon concludes.

Ariosto’s Orlando furioso shows that imagination is the focal point of the limitless activities that distinguish human beings from other living creatures, as well as from each other. Orlando’s madness (tied to the horizontal nature of love’s imagination) and Astolfo’s voyage to the moon (connected to the vertical movement of the creative imagination’s poetry) are at opposite poles. Yet, behind these issues of love, insanity, and the thirst for
knowledge lies the very basic notion of language as the basis for all human reality. The very different, yet ever fluctuating ties that these two characters share with the creative imagination support their roles as personifications of different approaches to language and life. As perceived by Ficino, these poles are, however, inseparable one from the other. There is no one figure in Ariosto's text that can be used as a key to unlock the door to earthly happiness; all the individual portraits must be gathered together into one unified frame that illustrates the complexity of human nature and of what has often been considered its distinguishing feature—the creative and poetic imagination.

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