Sound and Silence in Ariosto's Narrative

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Ever attentive to the Renaissance ideals of balance and harmony, the poet of the *Orlando Furioso*, in justifying an abrupt transition from one episode of his work to another, compares his method to that of the player of an instrument, who constantly changes chord and varies tone, striving now for the flat, now for the sharp.¹ Certainly this and other similar analogies of author to musician² well characterize much of the artistry of Ludovico Ariosto, who, like Tasso, even among major poets possesses an unusually keen ear, and who continually enhances his narrative by means of imaginative and often complex plays upon sound. The same keenness of ear, however, also enables Ariosto to enrich numerous scenes and episodes of his poem through the creation of the deepest of silences. The purpose of the present study is to examine and to illustrate the wide range of his literary techniques in each regard.

While much of the poet's sensitivity to the aural can readily be observed in his similes alone, many of which contain a vivid auditory component,³ his more significant treatments of sound are of course found throughout entire passages of his work. Let us now turn to such passages, which, for the convenience of the non-specialist, will be cited in our discussion both in the Italian text edited by Remo Ceserani, and in the excellent English prose translation by Allan Gilbert.⁴ In one instance, contrasting sounds, or perhaps more accurately, the transformation of one sound into another, even serves the implied didactic content of an episode with respect to the important theme of distinguishing illusion from reality. Here a naïve Ruggiero, having just arrived upon the island of the treacherous sorceress Alcina, falls an easy prey to the charms she summons up in order to entice him. The most powerful of the ugly hag's magical effects is that of appearing beautiful to the knight, yet her seduction of Ruggiero is also greatly aided by an entire atmosphere she creates as the two dine together that evening:

A quella mensa cõtare, arpe e lire,
e diversi altri dilettevol suoni

faceano intorno l'aria tintinire
 d'armonia dolce e di concenti buoni.
 Non vi mancava chi, cantando, dire
 d'amor sapesse gaudii e passioni,
 o con invenzioni e poesie
 rappresentasse grate fantasie (VII, 19).

At that table, cithers harps lyres and various other delightful instruments were making the air around vibrate with sweet harmony and good concords. Nor was there absent one who, singing, could tell the joys and passions of love or with stories and poems present pleasing fancies.

Perhaps even in these lines something of the artificial nature of Alcina's music and song is suggested in its very elaborateness, just as the falsity of her supposed beauties is subtly implied by the poet in preceding stanzas (VIII, 11-16). In any case, when Ruggiero is later freed from Alcina's spell, sees her in all her ugliness, and, horrified, sets out to flee her part of the island, the poet reminds his audience that the true sounds of her realm are as repugnant as her own physical appearance. In keeping with Ruggiero's newly corrected perceptions, which are auditory and tactile as well as visual, the knight now hears only the deafening screech of cicadas as he struggles among hard rocks and thick branches beneath a blazing sun:

Percuote il sole ardente il vicin colle;
 e dal calor che si riflette a dietro,
 in modo l'aria e l'arena ne bolle,
 che saria troppo a far liquido il vetro.
 Stassi cheto ogni augello all'ombra molle:
 sol la cicala col noioso metro
 fra i densi rami del fronzuto stelo
 le valli e i monti assorda, e il mare e il cielo (VIII, 20).

The fiery sun strikes the hill near at hand; and from the heat reflected backward, the air and the sand so boil that it would be more than enough to make glass liquid. Every bird is resting quiet in the cool shade; only the cicada, with his wearisome measure among the dense boughs of the leafy tree, deafens valleys and mountains and sea and sky.

In contrast to this exceptional instance in which plays upon sound contribute to the interests of didacticism, more typically the poet creates a variety of effects primarily as a means to enhance the atmosphere or dramatic potential of a given scene or episode. Such appears the case in the final stanzas of a minor scene in which the pagan Mandricardo, having recently abducted Doralice from the Saracen camp, rides with her at dusk and attempts to win her over with his ardent statements of devotion. Just after Doralice herself begins to feel and to communicate

the stirrings of the love which the two will soon consummate in the village they approach, Ariosto seems to underscore the happy mood of the moment by having Mandricardo hear the strains of shepherds' flutes and reeds from nearby dwellings:

Con questa compagnia lieto e gioioso,
che sì gli satisfà, sì gli diletta,
essendo presso all'ora ch'a riposo
la fredda notte ogni animale alletta,
vedendo il sol già basso e mezzo ascoso,
comminciò a cavalcar con maggior fretta;
tanto ch'udì sonar zuffoli e canne,
e vide poi fumar ville e capanne (XIV, 61).

Happy and joyful in this company that so satisfies him, so charms him — since it is near the hour when cold night induces every animal to repose, since he sees the sun already low and half hidden, he commenced to ride with greater haste, so that soon he heard flutes and reeds sounding and saw farm-houses and cabins sending out smoke.

Here the poet evokes mood through sound in a deliberately understated manner, yet elsewhere he creates entire sequences of auditory effects, often forming within them *crescendos* and *diminuendos*. Although of a derivative nature, a first example of what might justifiably be termed Ariosto's sense of "orchestration" within the *Orlando Furioso* can be seen in the well known episode concerning Olimpia, who awakens alone upon a deserted island and discovers that she has been abandoned there during the night by her false lover Bireno.⁵ The passage begins with the seemingly tranquil sounds which first intrude upon her carefree slumber, those of the kingfishers which fly over the sea:

e s'udîr le Alcione alla marina
de l'antico infortunio lamentarse (X, 20).

and the halcyons on the sea were heard lamenting their ancient misfortune.

Gentle as these sounds may be, they serve as a fitting overture which states the theme of Olimpia's suffering, for, described in the Ovidian terms above, they also call to mind the mythical tragedy of Queen Halcyon, who was metamorphosed into such a bird when she threw herself into the ocean following the loss of her husband Ceice.⁶ (Indeed, some stanzas later, Olimpia will three times contemplate the same form of self-destruction.) Subsequent sounds in the passage gradually increase in volume as the young woman, now realizing that she is alone, calls out for Bireno, only to be answered by echoes from the pitying caverns nearby. Here the poet recreates the futile repetition of her own voice as it cries out the name of her lover in vain:

Bireno chiama: e al nome di Bireno
rispondean gli Antri che pietà ne avieno (22).

She shouts: "Bireno," and with the name of Bireno the caverns that pitied her answered.

Still Olimpia's cries grow louder ("chiamò quanto potè chiamar più forte" ["she called out. . . as loud as she could call"] st. 24), until at last her voice fades away from pure exhaustion, and is replaced by quieter sounds which even more effectively convey her despair:

e dove non potea la debil voce,
suppliva il pianto e 'l batter palma a palma (25).

and where her weak voice had no power, tears and the striking of palm on palm made up the lack.

While the scene ends with Olimpia's six-stanza lament, which, despite the weakness of her voice, is carried over the waves to the perfidious Bireno by the wind, certainly her abandonment, isolation, and anguish are as much conveyed by these plays upon sound as by her actual words.

A similar technique serves as an essential ingredient to the poet's magnificent portrayal of a ship caught in storm at sea. Here as well, one finds a gradual increasing of sound within the episode, in a progression which begins with the sighs of the helmsman who vainly attempts to avoid disaster, then moves to the frightened cries of the crew, and finally to the crashing of the waves as they strike against the vessel. These latter sounds, one notes, are imaginatively and most effectively conveyed by means of an implied comparison to others, as they completely overwhelm the shouted commands of the pilot, who, in the great din, can only make desperate hand gestures to his shipmates:

Quel che siede al governo, alto sospira
pallido e sbigottito ne la faccia;
e grida invano, e invan con mano accenna
or di voltare, or di calar l'antenna.

Ma poco il cenno, e 'l gridar poco vale:
tolto è 'l veder da la piovosa notte.
La voce, senza udirsi, in aria sale,
in aria che feria con maggior botte
de' naviganti il grido universale,
e 'l fremito de l'onde insieme rotte:
e in prora e in poppa e in amendue le bande
non si può cosa udir, che si commande (XLI, 10, 11)

He who sits at the helm sighs loud, his face pale and bewildered, and shouts in vain, and in vain indicates with his hand now to turn, now to let down the yards.

But little his gesture helps, and his shout little; the rainy night takes away vision. His voice, without being heard, goes into the air, the air that the universal shout of the sailors and the roar of the waves broken against one another were striking with heavier blows, and at the prow and at the stern and at both sides not a thing that is ordered can be heard.

Again the poet increases volume as the storm continues to grow, for now the shouts of the crew and crashing of the waves are joined by the howling of the wind in the riggings and by the din of thunder from the sky:

De la rabbia del vento che si fende
ne le ritorte, escono orribil suoni:
di spessi lampi l'aria si raccende,
risuona 'l ciel di spaventosi tuoni (12).

From the fury of the wind that is cut by the rigging, terrible sounds issue; the air is on fire with frequent lightning; the sky resounds with frightful thunders.

Later in the same episode, this mixture of sounds comes to an abrupt and dramatic end, with reference to those of the crew who unwisely overcrowd their lifeboats and capsize when they take to the sea. Unlike their companions, who survive the storm by remaining aboard ship, these unfortunates call out to God until their cries are suddenly silenced by the water which rushes into their very throats:

Allor s'udì con dolorosi pianti
chiamar soccorso dal celeste regno:
ma quelle voci andaro poco inanti,
che venne il mar pien d'ira e di disdegno,
e subito occupò tutta la via
onde il lamento e il flebil grido uscia (20).

Then with doleful cries they were heard calling for aid from the Heavenly Kingdom, but their voices uttered little before the sea came, full of wrath and contempt, and instantly occupied all of the passage by which the lament and the tearful shriek were coming out.

Setting aside the various passages which convey the noise of combat by certain stock phrases traditional to the genre in which he writes,⁷ one can observe the same artistry in Ariosto's portrayal of sound when he turns to the theme of arms. Particularly noteworthy is a single stanza which describes a furious battle between the Christian and Saracen armies, for in a mere eight lines the poet not only includes a great amount of detail by means of auditory effects alone, but moreover methodically builds the clamour, line by line, into a deafening climax:

L'alto rumor de le sonore trombe,
 de' timpani e de' barbari stromenti,
 giunti al continuo suon d'archi, di frombe,
 di machine, di ruote et di tormenti;
 e quel di che più par che 'l ciel ribombe,
 gridi, tumulti, gemiti e lamenti:
 rendono un alto suon ch'a quel s'accorda,
 con che i vicin, cadendo, il Nilo assorda (XVI, 56)⁸

The loud clamor of sonorous trumpets, of drums and barbarous instruments, joined with the constant noise of bows, of slings, of machines, of wheels and of engines, and that with which it seems the sky echoes louder — shrieks outcries groans and laments — produce a loud noise that equals that with which the Nile as it falls deafens those who are near.

In another striking passage Ariosto portrays through an equally awesome din the death of tens of thousands of Saracens, who, following their leader Rodomonte in an attack upon Charlemagne's strong-hold, foolishly rush into an immense ditch which the enemy proceeds to set aflame. While the lines to follow maintain a steady level of volume, here as well one finds the poet's characteristic sense of orchestration — indeed, in this case a highly ironic one — as he stresses the curiously harmonious relationship of one sound to another: that of the screams of the pagan soldiers and the crackling of the flames which now consume them alive. In describing the scene in aesthetic terms which might better be suited to an appreciation of music, as well as in a near monorhyme which seems to suggest a prolonged shrieking, Ariosto, through sound alone, creates a moment of the blackest humour:

Sentesi un scoppio in un perpetuo suono,
 simile a un grande e spaventoso tuono.

Aspro concento, orribile armonia
 d'alte querele, d'ululi e di strida
 de la misera gente che peria
 nel fondo per cagion de la sua guida,
 istranamente concordar s'udia
 col fiero suon de la fiamma omicida (XIV, 133, 134).

Explosions are heard in a steady noise like great and terrifying thunder.

A rough concord, a horrible harmony of loud laments, of shrieks and cries from the miserable folk who because of their leader were perishing in the depths, was heard making strange consonance with the fierce sound of the murderous flames.

Within the entire poem, however, perhaps the most notable and important of Ariosto's orchestrations is that which is found at its very beginning, for here the poet appears to employ an extended series of

auditory effects as part of the very strategy of his opening canto. Such can be illustrated by means of a brief synopsis of its events, with reference to the role of sound in their portrayal. Following his introductory stanzas, in which he states his themes of arms and love, acknowledges his patrons, and recapitulates the point at which his predecessor Boiardo left off the work to which his own is a sequel, Ariosto begins his narrative by depicting a frightened Angelica, who, having just escaped from the confinement under which she had been placed by Charlemagne, flees through the forest on horseback. As seen in the maiden's flight and in Rinaldo's subsequent pursuit of her, the action of the narrative is launched by means of movement and speed; nonetheless, the transition from Ariosto's initial octaves to the living world of his knights and ladies appears most fully realized only when the scene is punctuated by Angelica's terrified cries. These first sounds of the poem are made all the more dramatic by means of a subtle change of perspective created by the poet, as he momentarily turns from her to describe the Saracen Ferraù, who pauses beside a stream where he has lost his helmet. Thus we, the readers, share the pagan's vantage point, and perhaps something of his surprise as well, as Angelica rushes toward us shrieking with all her might:

Quanto potea più forte, ne veniva
gridando la donzella ispaventata (I, 15).

Shrieking as loud as she could, the terrified girl was coming on.⁹

After the brief but memorable scenes in which Rinaldo arrives and battles Ferraù for the maiden, only for each to realize that she has long since fled, and in which Ferraù searches for the helmet he has lost in the stream only to have it taken from him by a ghost which confronts him there, the poet rejoins Angelica in her flight as she rides ever deeper into the woods. Just as the first sounds of the poem have aided in fully bringing to life its first protagonist, those which are now evoked serve the same function with regard to one of its major environments. Indeed, in the stirring of its leaves in the wind and the crackling of its twigs beneath the hoofs of her horse, one senses the vitality, suspense, and promise of adventure offered by the forest itself:

Fugge tra selve spaventose e scure,
per lochi inabitati, ermi e selvaggi.
Il mover de le fronde e di verzure,
che di cerri sentia, d'olmi e di faggi,
fatto le avea con subite paure
trovar di qua di là strani vïaggi (33).

She flees through dark and terrifying forests, through places uninhabited, waste and savage. The movements of the twigs and the leaves that she heard from the oaks, the elms and the beeches had made her take strange paths in sudden fright.

In the transition from Angelica's first shrieks to the quieter rustlings of the forest, Ariosto has begun a gradual diminishing of sound, one which is sustained and then completed in silence as the maiden, having ridden through the night, approaches a peaceful meadow at daybreak. Here, after creating a peaceful effect in the gentle rippling of the water from two brooks nearby, the poet ends the passage in the stillness of her sleep:

Trovossi al fine in un boschetto adorno,
che lievemente la fresca aura muove.
Duo chiari rivi, mormorando intorno,
sempre l'erbe vi fan tenere e nuove;
e rendea ad ascoltar dolce contento,
rotto tra picciol sassi, il correr lento.

...

Dentro letto vi fan tenere erbette,
ch'invitano a posar chi s'appresenta.
La bella donna in mezzo a quel si mette;
ivi si corca, et ivi s'addormenta (35, 38).

At last she came to a lovely grove that the cooling breeze lightly moves. Two clear murmuring streams nearby make the grass there always tender and fresh, and their slow current, broken among the little stones, gave out to the hearing sweet harmony.

...

Within, a bed is made by the tender short grass that invites to rest whoever comes. The beautiful woman goes to the middle of it, there she lies down, and there she falls asleep.

Following this pause, Ariosto now begins a series of increasingly louder sounds which serve to introduce three more figures into his narrative and at the same time to characterize them. The crescendo toward which he proceeds begins with the relatively gentle and unimpressive tread of the hoofbeats which awaken Angelica and announce the arrival of the hopelessly ineffectual warrior Sacripante:

Ma non per lungo spazio cosî stette,
che un calpestio le par che venir senta:
cheta si leva, e appresso alla riviera
vede ch'armato un cavallier giunt'era (38).

But she did not remain a long time thus before she seems to hear approaching the noise of hoofs. Quietly she raises herself and sees that an armed knight has come to the stream.

Soon after the stanzas which describe Sacripante's lament for Angelica's love, Angelica's presentation of herself and request for his aid, and Sacripante's schemes as to how he will now fulfill his desire for the helpless girl, a much louder sound — one which offers a humorous juxtaposition to the Saracen's intense concentration at the moment — announces the arrival of still another character. Just as Sacripante prepares to make his advances against Angelica, he finds his ear deafened by the thunder of a horse which bears a mysterious rider:

..... e mentre s'apparecchia
al dolce assalto, un gran rumor che suona
dal vicin bosco gl'intruona l'orecchia (59).

and while he prepares himself for the sweet attack, a great noise that sounds from the wood near at hand deafens his ear.

Certainly this clamour provides a fitting presentation of the valiant maiden warrior Bradamante, whom Sacripante is foolish enough to challenge, with the predictable result that he is promptly knocked to the ground. Soon afterward, when he dejectedly remounts his horse and rides on with Angelica, the two hear the loudest noise of the canto, a din so great that the entire forest seems to tremble from it. Appropriately introduced by this means is Baiardo, Rinaldo's worthy and highly spirited horse, who now comes crashing through the trees:

Non furo iti duo miglia, che sonare
odon la selva che li cinge intorno,
con tal rumore e strepito, che pare
che triemi la foresta d'ogn'intorno;
e poco dopo un gran destrier n'appare,
d'oro guernito, e riccamente adorno,
che salta macchie e rivi, et a fracasso
arbori mena e ciò che vieta il passo (72).

They had not gone two miles, when they heard the wood that encloses them ring with such noise and clamor that the forest seems to tremble on every side, and after a little there appears a great charger, equipped in gold and richly furnished, who leaps over bushes and streams, and smashes trees and whatever hinders his passage.

Finally, having arrived at this climax of sound and drawing near the end of his first canto, the poet reduces volume in the reintroduction of a last figure. As the two continue to ride on, Angelica sees Rinaldo approach and hearkens to the gentler sound of his armour:

Poi rivolgendo gli occhi, mira
venir sonando d'arme un gran pedone (77).

Then turning her eyes at random, she sees a tall man coming on foot in jingling armor.

As seen throughout this synopsis, perhaps nowhere in the *Orlando Furioso* does one find so extended or so significant a role played by sounds as in the opening canto, for here they serve not only to bring the poem and its initial characters to life, but moreover to create much of the rhythm, pace, and momentum which the work will sustain into its last stanza.

Yet while the more obvious of Ariosto's many appeals to the ear portray a rich variety of sound, others, of equal importance, portray its near or total absence. Even in the canto just discussed, one also finds, in the meadow in which Angelica takes refuge, the deepest of silences. A stillness to the woods is first implied in the fact that the maiden soon falls asleep there, and further evoked by the caution with which she has been seen to arise when awakened by the arrival of Sacripante ("*cheta si leva*" ["quietly she raises herself"] st. 38). Moreover, in the next stanza, when she has taken up a vantage point from which to spy upon this interloper, one fully senses the quiet of her surroundings, which she takes care not to break with even the slightest of sounds:

né pur d'un sol sospir l'aria percuote (39).

nor does she disturb the air with even a single sigh (translation mine).

Sacripante, in turn, contributes to the atmosphere which the poet has established by remaining immobile and not uttering a single word for "*più d'un'ora*" ("more than an hour" st. 40), before at last speaking his lament. Thus, by means of these brief but highly effective suggestions, Ariosto creates in the scene not only a suspenseful mood, but also a backdrop of silence in the forest, against which to contrast all the more effectively the sounds which repeatedly intrude upon it.

A similarly complementary relationship between silence and sound can also be observed in the previously cited episode concerning Olimpia, for just before beginning the orchestration of her awakening and suffering upon the island, the poet creates an atmosphere of profound quiet. This ambience is indicated by the very stealth with which Bireno abandons Olimpia in the night ("*pian piano esce dal letto*" ["ever so softly he gets out of bed"] X, 19, translation mine), and awakens the crew in order to set sail while she sleeps on:

e li risveglia; e senza udirsi un grido,
fa entrar ne l'alto e abandonare il lido (X, 19).

and [he] arouses them; without a shout being heard, he has them go out to sea and abandon the shore.

To a lesser degree, silence and sound are likewise effectively juxtaposed in a nocturnal episode which portrays the pagan soldiers Cloridano and Medoro, as they search a battlefield near sleeping Christian soldiers in search of their fallen king. At first, when Medoro finally succeeds in his mission, the silence of his surroundings is conveyed by the hushed tones with which he weeps over the body, lest he be discovered by the enemy:

e tutto 'l viso gli bagnò d'amaro
pianto, che n'avea un rio sotto ogni ciglio,
in sì dolci atti, in dolci lamenti,
che potea ad ascoltar fermare i venti.

Ma con sommessa voce e a pena udita (XVIII, 186, 187).

and [he] bathed all his face with bitter tears, so that he had a river of them beneath each eye, with such sweet actions, with such sweet laments as were enough to stop the winds to listen,

but with a voice low and scarcely audible.

Later in the same episode silence is again evoked when Cloridano, fleeing from the Christian soldiers who have discovered him and his companion, knows he has found safety only when he can no longer hear the shouts of his pursuers (XIX, 4). But finally, when the youth realizes that Medoro has remained behind and decides to rejoin him even at the cost of death, the poet gradually dissolves the atmosphere of silence he has created by having it broken in upon, little by little, by the sounds by means of which Cloridano seems to navigate in the darkness:

e onde era venuto si ravvia,
e torna di sua morte in su la traccia.
Ode i cavalli e i gridi tuttavia,
e la nimica voce che minaccia:
all'ultimo ode il suo Medoro, e vede
che tra molti a cavallo è solo a piede (XIX, 5).

and [he] takes again the way by which he came, and returns on the track of his death. All the while he hears the horses and the shouts and the hostile threatening voices. At last he hears his Medoro and sees that he is alone on foot among many on horseback.

In contrast to the episodes just cited, however, in which the absence of sound is rendered primarily as an objective or environmental condition, for the most part Ariosto's portrayals of silence are of a more subjective nature, as they are brought about by moments of absolute speechlessness among his characters. Frequently such moments create humorous effects, as seen in the cases of Leone, who, in learning of Ruggiero's great sacrifices on his behalf, remains so stunned, "senza muover bocca

o batter ciglia o mutar pie" ("without moving mouth or winking eye or shifting foot" XLVI, 38), that he resembles a statue one places in church for a vow; of Ferraù, whose voice stops in his throat from fright when he meets the ghost of Argaglia (I, 29); of King Astolfo, who, having taken a vow that he will not seek vengeance for what he is about to be told, must repress his urge to scream and shout when told that his wife has just betrayed him (XXVIII, 44); and, most amusingly, of the pagan warriors Rodomonte and Sacripante, who, shamed over having been bested in combat by Bradamante, a woman, maintain a silence which the poet delights in emphasizing repeatedly within the same passages.¹⁰ In Ariosto's more sober stanzas, however, the quiet moments of his characters can enhance or create atmosphere as much as those silences which are purely environmental. Such can be seen in the reverent awe of Bradamante, who remains "tacita e fissa" ("silent and attentive" III, 13), when she finds herself in Merlin's cave and meets the sorceress Melissa who will relate to her the poem's many important prophecies. Similarly, one finds an enhancement of mood in the momentary speechlessness of Angelica, who, desiring only to return to her homeland but instead finding herself lost upon a deserted shore, strikes a pose of supplication, "con le man giunte e con l'immote labbia" ("with. . . her hands clasped and her lips motionless" VIII, 39), just before voicing a lament which now commands our total attention and sympathies. Again, when she later falls prey to pirates who leave her naked and bound as a sacrifice to a sea-monster, Angelica's lack of words creates an air of pathos about her. Here, moreover, the poet utilizes her abrupt silence to emphasize, by means of contrast, the horrible sounds of the orc which soon approaches:

E dopo alcun' signozzi il parlar sciolto,
incominciò con fioco suono e lasso:
ma non seguì; che dentro il fe' restare
il gran rumor che si sentì nel mare (X, 99).

And when after some sighs her speech was set free, she began in a voice hoarse and weary, but she did not go on, for the great noise that was heard in the sea made it stay within.

Most notably, besides adding to the humour or general atmosphere of a passage, the temporary speechlessness of several characters also provides some of the richest moments of Ariosto's work in terms of its characterizations, psychological veracities, and sensitive explorations of human experience. In the stunned reaction of Rinaldo, for example, who has just learned that Angelica has given her love to another, one finds a silence at once of shock, loss, bitterness and grief, which seems to speak volumes:

Non ha poter d'una risposta sola;
 triema il cor dentro, et trieman fuor le labbia;
 non può la lingua disnodar parola;
 la bocca ha amara, e par che tòscò v'abbia (XLII, 41).

He does not have strength for a single answer; his heart trembles within and his lips tremble without; his tongue cannot let loose a word; his mouth is bitter and there seems to be poison in it.

Of equal depth in the varied emotions they portray are the similar moments which punctuate the tale of the Mantuan knight, who tells how he once foolishly tested his wife's faithfulness by means of a dishonourable scheme. In his story, aided by a sorceress who provides him with another identity and precious jewels, he appears before his mate and attempts to break down her resistance with his riches, until, in a voice subdued with shame, she accepts his propositions. Consequently, the knight remains speechless in his dismay:

per l'ossa andommi e per le vene un gielo;
 ne le fauci restò la voce fissa (XLIII, 39).

a chill went through my bones and through my veins; my words were left stuck in my throat.

Soon, however, it is the wife who remains unable to utter a word, when the sorceress who had transformed the knight returns him to his true identity. As the two can only stare at one another in mutual disbelief, just before the knight recovers sufficiently to voice his accusations, Ariosto creates one of the most eloquent silences in his poem — one which appears to be a combination of sadness and wounded pride for the husband, shame and humiliation for the wife, and shock, perhaps also an acute embarrassment, for the two of them:

Divenimmo ambi di color di morte,
 muti ambi, ambi restiàn con gli occhi bassi.
 Potei la lingua a pena aver sì forte,
 e tanta voce a pena, ch'io gridassi:
 "Me tradiresti dunque tu, consorte,
 quando tu avessi chi 'l mio onor comprassi?"
 Altra risposta dar mi ella non puote,
 che di rigar di lacrime le gote (40).

Both of us became the color of death, both stood silent, both with downcast eyes. I scarcely had tongue strong enough, and scarcely so much voice that I could cry out: 'Would you betray me then, wife, when you have some one who could buy my honor?' She could give me no other answer than to bathe her cheeks with tears.

Appropriately, the most complex and extended use of silence within the entire poem is that which is found in the presentation and develop-

ment of its central figure, Orlando. To some degree, it should be acknowledged, Orlando's frequent moments of speechlessness are in keeping with a natural disposition toward reticence, which is a legacy from his earlier portrayal in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*. Ariosto's debt to his predecessor in this regard can be illustrated by comparing Boiardo's lines "Orlando per costume e per natura/Molte parole non sapeva usare" ("By custom and by nature Orlando did not use many words"¹¹), with his own description of how the knight cuts short a dialogue with a lady in distress to whom he has just promised aid: "in parole con lei non si diffuse;/ che di natura non usava troppe" ("Orlando did not spin out words with her, because by nature he did not use too many" IX, 57). Nonetheless, while it is Boiardo who first associates Orlando with a generally taciturn nature — on occasion, it would appear, in the interests of humour¹² — it is the poet of the *Orlando Furioso* who most fully realizes this quality as a consistent character trait,¹³ and who attributes it to a deeper meaning. Indeed, just as in this latter work Orlando's love for Angelica proves to be a terrible sickness, his deep and lengthy silences appear to be for the most part¹⁴ pathological in nature.

Such can be noted even in Orlando's first appearance to the reader. Here, in the Christian camp at night, having alone been kept from sleep by his tormented thoughts of Angelica, the knight at last falls into a fitful dream in which he imagines the maiden in distress and calling for his aid. When Orlando awakens and subsequently sets off in search of her, the determined silence with which he undertakes this ill-fated mission well attests to the tragic isolation to which his obsessions have driven him even at this point in the poem. Indeed, in deserting camp without so much as a word to his uncle Charlemagne or even to his closest companion Brandimarte, Orlando reveals that his excessive love has not only caused him to neglect his duties as a soldier, but furthermore has cut him off from all ties to kin and to friendship:

Da mezza notte tacito si parte,
e non saluta e non fa motto al zio;
né al fido suo compagno Brandimarte,
che tanto amar solea, pur dice a Dio (VIII, 86).¹⁵

At midnight he goes away in silence, and he does not bid good-bye or say a word to his uncle, nor to his faithful companion Brandimart, whom he ever loved so much, does he even say "God be with you."

Ultimately, of course, Orlando's excessive love cuts him off from all ties to reality as well. Again, the extent of his sickness in this respect is subtly portrayed by means of an equally willful silence on his part when, some fifteen cantos later, after having discovered in a remote corner of the

woods the names of Angelica and Medoro carved upon every tree as a joyful testimony to the love they have shared there, he seeks rest in the cabin of a shepherd nearby. Here, when Orlando finds the same inscriptions written upon every wall, he refuses to ask the meaning of what he sees before him, in one last desperate attempt to deny what he knows to be all too true:

Chieder ne vuol: poi tien le labra chete;
che teme non si far troppo serena,
troppo chiara la cosa che di nebbia
cerca offuscar, perché men nuocer debbia (XXIII, 117).

He wants to ask about it; then keeps his lips closed, for he fears to make too evident, too clear, the thing he tries to darken with clouds, that it may injure him less.

Similarly, Orlando's silence again proves symptomatic of his deteriorating rationality when, having been informed by his garrulous and well-meaning host of more than he wishes to hear, he wanders through the woods until he returns to the very place of his earlier suffering. At this point he denies himself both food and sleep for three days, all the while staring into space without uttering a word, until finally his anguish in love leads to his total insanity:

Afflitto e stanco al fin cade ne l'erba,
e ficca gli occhi al cielo, e non fa motto,
Senza cibo e dormir così si serba,
che 'l sole esce tre volte e torna sotto.
Di crescer non cessò la pena acerba,
che fuor del senno al fin l'ebbe condotto (132).

Agonized and tired, at last he falls on the grass and fixes his eyes on the sky and does not say a word. Without food and sleep, he so keeps himself while the sun rises and sinks three times. His bitter pain did not stop growing worse until at last it drove him out of his mind.

Although Orlando later gives voice to his torment in the form of his frequent shrieks and cries (XXIII, 124, 125; XXI, 45), and although he speaks briefly on three minor occasions (XXIX, 70; XXX, 6-7, 11), certainly the knight has little capacity for words, and indeed appears virtually beyond any form of human communication until finally restored to his senses some ten cantos later. In this regard, his madness itself is portrayed through a form of silence, one which, in revealing the bestiality to which he has been reduced, and thus his alienation from his own humanity, attests to the greatest isolation to which his excesses in love have driven him. When challenged by Rodomonte at a bridge, for example, the mad Orlando merely charges ahead "e fa l'orecchia

sorda" ("and turns a deaf ear" XXIX, 42, translation mine). Likewise, when two shepherds leading a donkey order him to clear a road which he blocks, he "answers" them only in the language of brute force, in an idiom which one would far sooner expect from the animal in the scene:

Orlando non risponde altro a quel detto,
se non che con furor tira d'un piede,
e giunge a punto l'asino nel petto (XXIX, 53).

Orlando gives no answer to those words, except that with one foot he kicks with fury and strikes the donkey right in the chest.

Finally, one finds a last portrayal of Orlando in terms of silence in the scene which depicts his gradual restoration to sanity. Here, when captured, held down, and forced to inhale from the jar containing his lost senses which Astolfo has retrieved from the moon, the knight at first merely gazes at his benefactors without speaking a word:

E Brandimarte, e il fratel d'Aldabella,
e quel che 'l senno in capo gli ridusse,
pur pensando riguarda, e non favella (XXXIX, 59).

and he looks at Brandimart and at the brother of Aldabella and at him who brought his mind back into his head, and does not speak.

By now, however, Orlando's reticence, a contemplative one, attests less to his madness than to his recovery. Subsequently, when he is fully restored to his right mind at the beginning of the next stanza, he speaks succinctly, but with great dignity, repeating in Latin the words "*Solvite me*" from a Virgilian eclogue.¹⁶ Toward the end of the poem, as seen in the sentiments he expresses at Brandimarte's funeral, Orlando's recovery even allows him to achieve an unprecedented eloquence (see XLIII, 170 ff.).

To summarize, throughout the *Orlando Furioso* Ariosto enhances the portrayal of numerous scenes and episodes by means of a wide variety of appeals to the ear. In the many passages enhanced by variations in sound — such as those of Alcina's seduction of Ruggiero and his escape from her island, Olimpia's betrayal by Bireno, the growing of a storm at sea, and the battles of Christian against Saracen — one often notes what could be termed the poet's sense of orchestration, particularly throughout the entire first canto of his work. On at least as many occasions, however, Ariosto also appeals to the ear by creating moments of relative or total silence, whether as an environmental condition, such as in the stillness of the forest or the quiet of night, or as a subjective one, as seen in the frequent speechlessness of his characters, particularly Orlando. As a parting question, it might be asked which phenomenon, sound or

silence, predominates within Ariosto's narrative in terms of its fundamental themes. Perhaps, if one considers the episode of Astolfo's flight to the moon to contain the poet's major philosophical statement, the answer is the latter. For there, in contrast to the sound and fury of earth, one finds a desolate and presumably silent landscape which offers poignant testimony to the reality of human experience, both in man's follies and in the inevitable passing of all things mortal. It is on the moon that we hear the final reverberations of Ariosto's major themes of love and arms, inasmuch as Astolfo finds there both the sighs of lovers (XXXIV, 75) and, more pathetically, encapsuled within a mountain of swollen bladders, the tumults and shouts of the once mightiest of empires (st. 76). In reading these powerful stanzas, one is reminded of a later poet, equally keen of ear, who, in hearkening to the lonely song of a workman returning from his toil at night, asks himself what has become of the roar of past ages, and contemplates the eternal silence into which they have long since been absorbed.¹⁷ Yet if, as a last testimony to human folly and caducity, silence appears to be thematically the more emphatic of Ariosto's effects, it must also be remembered that the same poet believed in man's transcendence through art. In a deeper sense, then, it is the varied sounds and clamour of his vibrant world of knights and ladies which ultimately prevail.

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Notes

- 1 "Signor, far mi convien come fa il bono / sonator sopra il suo instrumento arguto, / che spesso muta corda, e varia suono, / ricercando ora il grave, ora l'acuto" ("I must do, My Lord, as does the good musician on his sensitive instrument, for he often changes chord and varies tone, striving now for the flat, now for the sharp") VIII, 29. Throughout this study all references to the Italian text, which will be cited by canto and stanza, are from the edition of Remo Ceserani (Torino: U.T.E.T., 1962), to whose notes I am indebted for several of my observations regarding literary derivations. The greater part of the English renderings of Ariosto's verse are cited from the admirable prose translation by Allan Gilbert (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1954). In the case of a few lines, I have substituted my own translation and identified it as such.
- 2 See also XXIX, 74, and XXX, 16.
- 3 As seen in Ariosto's comparisons of a duel between two knights to the fighting of snarling dogs (II, 5); of Ruggiero's attack upon a sea-monster to the descent of an eagle upon a hissing snake (X, 103); of an onslaught of Saracens to the swarming of flies with buzzing wings (XIV, 109); and of the efforts of Medoro in protecting the body of his fallen king to those of the she-bear who protects her young from the hunter with growls of devotion and madness (XIX, 17). Occasionally the aural components of such similes add humour to an image, as seen in the poet's likening of the tumult of Saracens who pursue Orlando to that caused by villagers who chase the wolf or bear which has just run off with the squealing pig (XII, 77); and in his comparison of a jilted and plaintive Rodomonte to the bull, which, having

lost the heifer in combat, goes off far from the herd to bellow in solitude (XXVII, 111). At the moment of his capture, Orlando as well is compared to a bull — one which bellows when hunted by a pack of dogs — yet here the simile appears as tragic as comical (XXXIX, 52). The poet's similes can also include the softest of sounds, as in the case of Bradamante, who hears castle doors open to her with the eagerness of the lover who after long delays hears the bolt move from behind the door which will admit him (XXXII, 74); and in the case of Rodomonte, whose skill and grace as a warrior allow him to leap a ditch and land as though upon felt (XIV, 130). In one instance a simile moves from sound to silence itself, as Zerbino, having just chided Gabrina for the disappearance of his Isabella, grows quiet when told that she knows his lover's whereabouts, and is thus likened to the watchdog whose barks are quickly silenced by the thief's bribe of food (XX, 139). Certainly the poet's interest and skill in similes containing aural components can be noted in his imitation of Dante's celebrated lines portraying the hissing of a burning log, for here Ariosto expands his predecessor's original tercet (*Inf.*, XIII, vv. 40-42) into an entire octave (VI, 27).

4 See editions cited in note 1.

5 The episode itself, as well as the greater part of plays upon sound within it, derives from Ovid's *Heroides*, X, 7 ff., in which Ariadne recalls her abandonment upon a lonely isle by Theseus. For a discussion of the significance of Olimpia's sleep in this passage, as well as the role of related phenomena throughout Ariosto's poem as a whole, see Daniel Rolfs, "Sleep, Dreams, and Insomnia in the *Orlando Furioso*," *Italica*, 53 (1976), 453-74.

6 According to myth, when the wife of the King of Troy saw the body of her husband recovered from a shipwreck, she leaped from a cliff into the sea, and both were transformed into the bird which now bears her name. See Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XI, 410 ff.

7 In comparing the battle scenes in the poems of Boiardo and Ariosto, one finds a pronounced similarity in most of their hyperboles, as the sound of drums and trumpets, the shouts of soldiers, and the clashing of swords are often said to make the mountains, valleys, earth and heavens tremble or echo, such that the world seems about to come to an end. For parallel phrases of this sort, cf. *Orlando Innamorato*: Bk. I: I, 11; II, 59; III, 5, 59; IV, 37-38; VII, 5; XV, 1, 5; Bk. II: VI, 59; XIV, 56; XV, 39-40; XX, 12, 16; XXIV, 6; XXVIII, 21; XXX, 45-46; Bk. III: VII, 60; VIII, 7, 10, 24; and *Orlando Furioso*, II, 10; XI, 43; XV, 15; XVIII, 16, 41; XIX, 92; XX, 83, 88; XXIV, 100; XXVII, 19, 29; XXX, 47; XXXI, 87.

8 For the antecedents to Ariosto's simile regarding the deafening roar caused by the cataracts of the Nile River, see Cicero's *De Republica*, VI, xviii, 19; Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, XLVIII, 9-10, and Poliziano's *Stanze*, I, 28, 5-6.

9 It is worthy of note that the poet, with characteristic symmetry, will have Angelica exit from the poem some twenty-nine cantos later just as she enters it here. In her last appearance, pursued by the mad Orlando, Angelica flees on horseback, "tutta tremando, e empiendo il ciel di grida" ("all over trembling and filling the air with shrieks") XXIX, 60.

10 As to Rodomonte, the poet alludes to his silence three times: "Di maraviglia il pagan resta muto, / ch'una donna a cader l'abbia condotto; / e far risposta non potè o non volle, / e fu come uom pien di stupor e folle. / Di terra si levò tacito e mesto" ("The pagan remains mute with astonishment that a woman has brought him to falling; he was not able to reply or did not wish to and was like a man full of amazement and witless. He raised himself from the ground silent and sad.") XXXV, 50, 51. The silence of Sacripante, however, is emphasized even more: "Poi che gran pezzo al caso intervenuto / ebbe pensato invano, e finalmente / si trovò da una femina abbattuto, / che pensandovi più, più dolor sente; / montò l'altro destrier, tacito e muto: / e senza far parola chetamente / tolse Angelica in groppa. . ." ("When for a long time he had vainly thought on what had happened, and at the time found himself struck down by a female — and the more he thinks about it the more distress he feels — silent and dumb he mounted the other horse, and not uttering a word he took Angelica quietly on the crupper. . .") I, 71.

- 11 Bk. II, XX, 59; translation mine. Here and in subsequent notes all references to Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* are from the edition of Aldo Scaglione (Torino: U.T.E.T., 1966).
- 12 On one occasion, while riding with a maiden who brazenly speaks to him of love in order to seduce him, Boiardo's Orlando, for all that he desires her, remains tongue-tied out of embarrassment and awkwardness (Bk. I, XXIX, 47-48).
- 13 The supposedly taciturn nature of Boiardo's protagonist, by contrast, appears somewhat contradicted on those occasions in which he proves to be alternately articulate, sententious, and even eloquent, as can be seen in his sermonizing on the requirements of knightly honour (Bk. I, XVIII, 32 ff; XXV, 13 ff.), or the importance of the Christian faith (Bk. II, XII, 17). A greater inconsistency of character in this regard, however, would appear to be presented by the well known episode in which, having been forced to break off a duel with Agricane because of darkness, Orlando passes the night with the latter by speaking of his awe for God's creation, his belief that the True Faith and learning are necessary complements to chivalric virtue, and — most notably — of his suffering and love for Angelica (Bk. I, XVIII, 41 *et passim*).
- 14 In certain instances in Ariosto's work, Orlando's moments of reticence appear to be associated with chivalric virtue, as seen in the preludes to two duels, in which he courteously hears out the offensive statements of his adversaries until, having lost all patience, he responds in justified anger. Note as examples the lines "Non potè aver più pazienza Orlando, / e gridò. . ." ("Orlando could have no more patience and shouted. . ." XII, 45); and "Il Conte più non tacque, / e gridò forte. . ." ("the Count was silent no more, and shouted loudly. . ." XXIII, 80), which precede his combats with Ferraù and Mandricardo, respectively. Clearly virtuous is that part of Orlando's reticence which can be attributed to his modesty, as seen in the lines in which the poet explains his ignorance of the knight's heroic exploits during the winter: "non è colpa mia s'or non le conto; / perchè Orlando a far l'opre virtuose, / più che a narrarle poi, sempre era pronto" ("it is not my fault if I do not relate them, for Orlando was always more ready to do deeds of valor than later to tell of them" XI, 81).
- 15 Similarly, following a tradition of the genre, Boiardo portrays a troubled Orlando who leaves his bed and sets off at night without a word to his companions in his quest for Angelica (*Orlando Innamorato*, Bk. I, II, 27-28). The passage, which doubtless inspired Ariosto, might be considered a rare instance in which Boiardo associates his protagonist with silence in a context which transcends humour and enriches the deeper aspects of his character.
- 16 Orlando's words repeat those of the god Silenus, who, in Virgil's *Eclogue VI*, awakens from a drunken slumber, finds himself tied up by playful shepherds, and demands his release.
- 17 See Leopardi's "La Sera del Dì di Festa," vv. 24-39.