

Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*

A Never-Ending Story

Ludovico Ariosto was one of the most important writers of his time, famous in Italy for his epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (first published in 1516), in which he expressed a tongue-in-cheek view of chivalry. Yes, there are knights and damsels, Saracens and Christians, heroic daring-do. But there is also much absurdity, in fact adventures are taken to their extreme. For example, seeking Orlando's sanity (*il senno*), which is said to be sealed in an ampoule and lost on the moon, Astolfo travels on a hippogriff – a mythological creature that is half-eagle, half-horse (Harry Potter fans know what this is), and eventually recovers the *senno* from a mountaintop.

This year is the 500th anniversary of *Orlando Furioso*, which has inspired writers and artists throughout time. Think of Cervantes, whose protagonist Don Quixote was also a crazed lover (with the difference that Orlando was crazed by romantic love, Don Quixote by reading too many books about chivalry).

In the context of Lucca Comics, the Fondazione Lazzereschi in Porcari offers a display entitled *Orlando Curioso, Ludovico Ariosto's voyage into the labyrinths of the fantastic* (continuing until late December), with fantastic figurines, holograms and large-scale comic illustrations based on Ariosto's characters. At Castelnuovo Garfagnana's Fortezza di Mont'Alfonso last month, the exhibit *500 Years of Orlando Furioso* included artworks by Antonio Possenti, a film, conferences and a Renaissance market. At Lucca's Teatro del Giglio on 14 January, Vivaldi's opera *Orlando Furioso* will be presented.

Who was this man? Ludovico Ariosto studied philosophy at the University of Ferrara and became an emissary for the Duca d'Este Alfonso I. From 1502 to 1503 he served as commander of the fortress at Canossa (formerly the castle of Tuscany's empress Matilde); later, from 1522 to 1525, he served the Duke at Castelnuovo Garfagnana. As commissioner of



Ariosto viewed by Possenti

this mountainous territory, he spent much of his time trying to rid the wilderness roads of bandits. Over the years he also wrote verses and took the time to revise *Orlando Furioso*, expanding it from 40 to 46 cantos.

He wrote about the arduous Garfagnana in *Satire IV* (verses 139-144):

*La nuda Pania tra l'Aurora il Noto,
da l'altre parti il giogo mi circonda
che fa d'un Pellegrin la gloria noto.
Questa è una fossa, ove abito, profonda
dove non muovo piè senza salire
del silvoso Apennin la fiera sponda.*

*The bare Pania, between Dawn and Noto,
from across the ridge surrounds me
and makes its glory known to pilgrims.
This is a deep pit, where I live,
where you can't move a step without climbing
the proud slope of the wooded Apennine.*

(Note: In Ariosto's time the Sicilian town of Noto had a heroic reputation.)

– by Norma Jean Bishop

Ariosto lived in the fortress known today as Rocca Ariostesca, a square-shaped structure with towers at the corners. His isolation and poetic reflections recently inspired *Il Furioso in Garfagnana*, a fictional documentary made by the Associazione Culturale Chirone di Lucca (technical collaborators Infinity Blue srl) with the support of the Fondazione Banca del Monte di Lucca.

To celebrate the 500th anniversary of *Orlando Furioso*, students are being invited to submit their projects for the first edition of a national competition, *Il tempo della poesia: Un viaggio nella vita e nella poesia di Ludovico Ariosto*, promoted by the Fondazione Banca del Monte di Lucca, the Town of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, the MIUR (Tuscan Region Scholastic Office), and other local and regional entities.

The deadline for enrollment is 31 December 2016, and for submissions 29 April 2017. Winners will be announced to the schools on 10 May 2017, and presented at the Teatro Alfieri of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana on 26 May 2017. A display of the winning projects is planned between 2017 and 2018 at the Palazzo Esposizioni of the Fondazione BML. For information, please contact:

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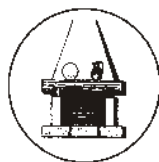
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