

NATURA NARRANS:
LANDSCAPE AS LITERATURE IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

by
TROY TOWER

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Abstract

This dissertation uncovers literary self-consciousness in the forest settings of early modern Italian narratives, which exploit the symbolic and ecological properties of forest environments to fashion meditations on various aspects of narrative composition. The first chapter presents the etymological associations between woods, words and metaphysical generation solidified by Aristotelian commentators and applies these to the *selva oscura* of Dante's *Commedia*. A reading of the opening forest as reflective of the poem's still unrealized potential illuminates a sequence of metaliterary settings and throws into relief a character in the forest of suicides who seems aware both of his transformation into a poetic device and of his limited role within Italian literary history. A Dantesque pastiche tinges a haunted pine forest in one of Boccaccio's novellas that expounds a spirit of inspired opportunism synonymous with the *Decameron* itself. The other narrative exploitations of the forest treated in the second chapter betray Boccaccio's understanding of the randomness and believability necessary to hold the literary work in tension between nature and artifice, city and country, safety and danger, as emblemized by that other perennial symbol for the macronarrative, the garden. The final two chapters examine the same features of the forest in later works that imagine literary composition as a far less balanced operation. The plot of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* depends on its forest settings so much that it allows the trees to narrate its most momentous episode. By fully immersing the romance in the rhythms and vulnerabilities of the forest ecologies the author reveals the complexity and, indeed, vitality of literary worlds. Eager to clear the Ariostean woods from the morally legitimate realm of narrative poetry, Tasso devises a highly organized drama in which the forest is exploited for every material, spiritual and narrative functionality that can serve the pious and conservative

hermeneutics demanded by counter-Reformation academics. Despite a lexical rigor that views trees as machines, the *Gerusalemme liberata* still gives room to explore the pathetic, personal potential of trees, especially those that share the poet's name. While unique to the works containing the various forests, the four studies together trace the use of a particular construction to effect metaliterary commentary and in so doing confirm the general tendencies of early modern Italian literature, especially those concerning the complication of literary communication, through the relatively unexplored subfield of setting.

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Abbreviations

Along with the Vulgate, several frequently referenced works are cited parenthetically in this dissertation, using the following abbreviations:

CC, OF = Ariosto, *Orlando furioso e cinque canti*, eds. Ceserani and Zatti

Dec. = Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca. The letters α and ω refer to the days' introductions and conclusions, respectively

GL = Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. Guglielminetti

Inf., Par., Purg. = Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, ed. Singleton

RVF = Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata

Full bibliography is given after the conclusion.

Introduction: *Natura narrans*¹

“And the songbirds keep singing,
Like they know the score”
Fleetwood Mac, *Songbird*²



Self-referentiality is one of the hallmarks of artistic expression. While any work of art can be understood as exploiting its mere presentation to refer to its own qualifications as a work of art — such was the groundbreaking argument of Nelson Goodman³ — the most rewarding works of art perform this self-commentary openly. The masterpieces of the earliest centuries of Italian literature, for example, routinely describe themselves via a first-person speaker whom readers are invited to understand as the mouthpiece of the author. The narrator in Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia*, completed before the poet’s death in 1321, describes his attempt to describe the divine as a pilgrim’s attempt to climb a dangerous mountain (*Inf.* 1.1-60). The narrator of the frame tale in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, composed between 1349 and 1351,⁴ likens his text to a pleasant stroll through a meadow that readers encounter after surpassing their own Dantesque hill (*Dec.* 1.α.4). The singer of Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, the final edition of which is published in 1532, employs several metaphors to describe his task, among them the rhetoric of weaving and the author’s struggle with a pattern that seems to have a life of its own.⁵ At the very opening of Torquato Tasso’s

¹ The Latinism in the titles of this chapter and dissertation was coined by Pier Massimo Forni in a personal conversation in April 2010.

² Christine McVie’s *Songbird* is track A6 on *Rumours* (Warner Bros., 1977).

³ See Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 67-68.

⁴ For the dating of the *Decameron* see Vittore Branca, “Vita e opere di Giovanni Boccaccio”, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), xli-lxxvi, xlv-xlvi.

⁵ For weaving imagery see *OF* 2.30, 13.80-81 and 22.3. Other self-referential metaphors refer to the arts such as music (*OF* 7.19, 8.29 and 30.16-17) and sculpture (3.3-4) as well as modes of locomotion like sailing (46.1), hunting (8.21, 22.4) and the following of paths (1.32, 4.50, 5.4, 9.93 and 17.80). On metaliterary images based on craft see Dennis Looney, *Compromising the Classics: Romance Epic Narrative in the Italian Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 91-109. On narrative motion in the *Furioso* see John Bernard, “‘Ch’io nol lasci ne la penna’: Ariosto’s Discourses of Desire”, *Italica* 76.3 (1999): 291-313, 293-294.

Gerusalemme liberata, first printed in 1581, the poem is presented as a honeyed cup of medicine (*GL* 1.3), which introduces readers to the stringent poetic morality that will govern the entire poem. Each of these metaphors announce not only the most essential characteristics of the work itself but also the literary traditions to which each work responds, for example, Boccaccio's differential relationship to Dante or Tasso's Horatian bent.⁶ These overt, first-person declarations of literary identity are the most obvious aspects of a subtler program of metaliterary imagination that can be read throughout the same poems. Indeed, the explicit identifications in each of these narratives presents can act as signposts for further investigation into a relatively understudied element of the famously self-referentiality of their works: their settings.

Acting as indices for programmatic metaliterary expression, signposts like these expressions could inspire metaliterary investigations that, for instance, extrapolate meaning from later iterations of the original self-referential metaphor. If the *Furioso* describes itself as a tapestry,⁷ in an example discussed in the third chapter, then the richly woven nuptial pavilion traveling through time to arrive at the poem's concluding wedding can also be convincingly interpreted as a symbol for the poem itself to be analyzed for further critique legible in the components of the specific invention, for example, the pavilion's ability to travel in time or the intricacy of its oramentation.⁸ Alternatively, metaliterary significance can be perceived through readerly intuition that is later confirmed by evaluating their consonance with overt statements about literary identity made by that work. A novella in the

⁶ On Boccaccio's relationship to Dante see Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 9-68. Tasso offers a specifically Horatian endorsement of literary marvel in a 1576 letter to Scipione Gonzaga; see Torquato Tasso, *Lettere poetiche*, ed. Carla Molinari (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda, 1995), letter 38.

⁷ See *OF* 2.30, 13.80-81 and 22.3.

⁸ Melissa's pavilion is described in *OF* 46.77-98 and is treated as a metaliterary symbol in Jane Tylus, "Imitating Othello: The Handkerchief, alla Italiana", *Renaissance Drama* (New Series) 36-37 (2010): 237-260, 238-241.

Decameron that makes dinner theatre of a grotesque supernatural punishment (*Dec.* 5.8), for example, immediately evokes the *Commedia* but can only be read as a miniature of Boccaccio's literary ambitions after further consideration of Boccaccio's explicit relationship to Dante. The present dissertation will focus on this second, more intuitive category of metaliterary investigation, seeking suggestions of the literary character of a given work in the diegetic construct of its narrative, specifically its settings. In performing such readings this study traces a commonality between the works heretofore unremarked in Italian literature: the recurrent appearance of the forest setting as a highly effective symbol for the work that imagines it.⁹

As can be argued for many other tropes in the Italian vernacular literary tradition, the metaliterary forest finds an early expression with Dante, who founds his *Commedia* in a “selva oscura” (*Inf.* 1.2) that can be read not only as an allegory for perdition, as tradition dictates,¹⁰ but also as a literalization of the dark subject matter — in Tuscan, *materia*, etymologically related to *selva* — that constitutes the yet unformed poem. In a forest

⁹ The present study is not the first to consider the forest constructions of these four authors: the earliest is likely Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), which examines the enduring use of the forest in art from antiquity to the twentieth century to signal divergences from psychosocial normality. Other histories of forest settings in literature include Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993); and Albrecht Classen, *The Forest in Medieval German Literature: Ecocritical Readings from a Historical Perspective* (Lanham: Lexington, 2015). The study closest to literary interests of this dissertation is Jean-Christophe Cavallin's *Poeta faber: Allegorie della materia*, tr. Anna Maria Babbi (Verona: Fiorini, 2004), a volume on materialist metaphors that also touches on the four poets' metaliterary imagery. Cavallin's arguments on Tasso's metaphors are quite similar to those in the present study, drafts of which can be documented to predate the author's encounter with Cavallin's study in 2013, but such a coincidence only underscores the proximity of the interpretations in this and Cavallin's study to the impulses present within the text itself.

¹⁰ The paragraph opening Fiore Bassanese's entry “Dark Wood” in the *Dante Encyclopedia* maintains that “[w]hatever specific allegorical meaning the image might contain, its general intent is clear: the lost way represents a departure from virtue and truth into the chaos of sin [...]. The wood's darkness is generally taken to denote error and is associated with evil, while the wood itself has been interpreted as the human condition of worldliness, corruption, and ignorance”; see Richard Lansing, ed., *Dante Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 287-289, 287. The standard Italian-language Dante reference bears the same characterization: see Eugenio Ragni, “selva”, in Umberto Bosco, ed., *Enciclopedia dantesca* (Rome: Treccani, 1970-1976) 5:137-142.

reminiscent of several landscapes of the *Commedia*,¹¹ Boccaccio can be seen to represent himself in his *Decameron* as the opportunist gentleman Nastagio degli Onesti, who throws a dinner party centered around an unmistakably Dantesque phantasmagoria that recurs in a foreboding pine forest. Meditating on centuries of chivalric poetry inspired by forest adventures,¹² Ariosto makes his *Orlando furioso* wholly coterminous with the forest by linking the progress of his poem with locomotion through the forest. The tradition of alluding to the text through the forest perhaps culminates with Tasso's *Liberata*, a poem obsessed with the forest's capacity to yield "materia",¹³ referring at once to the wooden material (*materia*, in Tuscan) needed within the poem to build siege instruments and also the subject matter (also *materia*) needed by the poem to defer its foregone conclusion.

Each of the four narratives linking the forest and the work that contains it depends in varying degrees on two fundamental connections between linguistic expression and the environment. One connection, introduced in the second chapter, is structural and concerns both the application of textual criticism to the environment and also the application of environmental criticism to texts, such as Tasso's likening the narrative poem to a "picciolo mondo", a simile discussed in the final chapter.¹⁴ The elision between textual expression and the concept of an organic world formed a perspective that enabled cosmologists throughout pre-modern and early modern Europe to imagine a Book of Nature.¹⁵ In a related extension of the perceived textuality of the world, vernacular poets like the troubadours of twelfth- and

¹¹ Vittore Branca's edition of the *Decameron* (670-680) signals several citations from the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* in *Dec.* 5.8.

¹² On the role of the forest in European chivalric narratives see Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948), 99-106 and 191-195.

¹³ *Materia* as lumber is found in *GL* 13.1, 13.17, 13.50, 18.3 and 18.41.

¹⁴ Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, in *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*, ed. Luigi Poma (Bari: Laterza, 1964), 3-55, 36.

¹⁵ For a history of the concept of the Book of Nature see Olaf Pedersen, *The Book of Nature* (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1992), 3-53. For a history of literary expressions of the Book of Nature see Curtius, *Europäische Literatur*, 321-327.

thirteenth- century Provence imagined themselves as having access to this script, thereby calcifying the trope of the inspirational songbird that, as seen in the Fleetwood Mac ballad cited at the opening of this dissertation, continues to structure lyric poetry well into the era of recorded music.

A second connection linking forests and literary works is etymological and investigates the classical roots between terms used to discuss forestry, metaphysics and literary composition. As the first and fourth chapters will discuss, the *Commedia* bases the entire metaliterary narrative accompanying the diegetic narrative of the pilgrim on the textual and metaphysical associations of the word *selva*, while the *Liberata* exploits the etymology of the related word *materia* in a similar yet more nuanced operation of literalization. These four readings not only enrich the comprehensive critical understanding of the metaliterary commentary made implicit and explicit by each work but also trace the history of this trope, which can inform future inquiries into the poetic, ecological and philosophical practices of early modern Italy.

Methodology

Unlike a study of the *Furioso*'s weaver, the advocacy of honeyed cups in the *Liberata* or other overt poetic self-descriptions, however, the readings of the forest offered by this dissertation derive primarily from readerly intuition, wholly projected onto the text from the external. But how can readers ascertain the validity of their intuitions about the metaliterary import of various passages? While any aspect of a work of art can be read as asserting itself as an exemplary or exemplarily faulty result of its artistic classification, as Goodman argued,¹⁶ each resulting interpretation still varies in the degree to which it can convince other

¹⁶ *Ways of Worldmaking*, 65-69.

reasonable readers. To gain a degree of critical validity, then, these intuitions must be compared with other evidence inside and outside that work.

This dissertation will examine its readings of the forests along the lines of three inquiries concerning coherence, context, and extrapolability by juxtaposing each intuition against explicit admissions of literary practice, other depictions of the forest and further metaliterary imagery in works by the same author. The connections offered by such investigations can lend critical legitimacy to the original readerly intuition through a process of evidence collection that aims to check readerly intuitions against the limited interpretative matrix that Umberto Eco termed the *intentio operis*.¹⁷ In his lectures on the scale of interpretive validity, Eco proposed a system of restrictions and energies internal to the text connecting the limited and often questionable camp of interpretations that presuppose a degree of authorial intent with the infinite camp of potentially tenuous interpretations by readers. This system lies within the literary expression itself and exerts its own force in legitimizing certain theses and discrediting others. Eco's formulations of the *intentio operis* are published in the same years that scattered literary critics began to organize around ecological themes and inaugurate, in 1991, the discourse of ecocriticism that evaluated the various intersections between literature and the organic world.¹⁸ Later ecocritics like Timothy Morton envisioned the vitality of textual expression and the active role the text takes in determining its own interpretations,¹⁹ preserving the Ecoian idea that the poem

¹⁷ For the concept of the *intentio operis* see Umberto Eco, "Overinterpreting Texts", in Stefan Collini, ed., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45-66, 63-66.

¹⁸ For an early history of self-proclaimed ecocriticism see Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis", in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xv-xxxvii, xvii-xviii. Most scholarship locates in Joseph Meeker's 1974 study *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Scribner) the birth of a critical approach that simultaneously considers literature and the environment with

¹⁹ See Timothy Morton, "Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology", *Oxford Literary Review* 32.1 (2010): 1-17, 10-12.

shapes its own meaning through an agency entirely separate from those exerted by either the author, the reader or the formal medium. The present study will thus proceed by verifying an external, readerly intuition against more easily confirmable evidence of the four works' poetic ambitions.

The evidence collected for these arguments will seek to increase the validity of the fundamental metaliterary intuitions by following three chief inquiries, all of which can be exemplified with an interpretation of the central scene of the *Orlando furioso*, perhaps the most obvious of the self-reflexive forests treated in the following chapters. In the titular episode of the *Orlando furioso* (*OF* 23.95-24.14), Orlando finds himself in a clearing after his disoriented horse has wandered for two days in the forest. The trees he sees are everywhere inscribed with love notes between Orlando's beloved Angelica and the Saracen page Medoro, as are the walls of a nearby cottage where he learns the lovers had wed and repeatedly consummated their marriage. Orlando's hesitant interpretation of these inscriptions leads to his insanity, which manifests with his immediate destruction of the cottage, shepherd, trees and rocks. Readers can easily intuit a metaliterary import behind these actions: Orlando aims his fury at any medium containing the story that appears to have just written him out of the role of protagonist. Following this reading, this episode can demonstrate Orlando's realization that not only is he a character in a story but he is only a character, no longer the absolute center of that story. Many arguments can be drawn from this interpretation — for example, Jane Tylus's reading of Ariosto's sense of historical belatedness that the *Furioso* includes in its text²⁰ — but before such extrapolations can be

²⁰ See Jane Tylus, "The Curse of Babel: The *Orlando Furioso* and Epic (Mis)Appropriation", *MLN* 103.1 (1988), 154-171.

performed readers need to make additional critical inquiries to help substantiate the intuition that the forest landscape here stands for the text of the poem containing it.

The first inquiry should concern context, seeking connections between a particular metaliterary image and any explicit statements concerning the author's literary practice, found either within the text or in texts in its orbit, such as theoretical writings, letters or other literary works. In this case, the central episode of the *Furioso* can be compared against the other overt instances of narration in the poem. The most famous first-person admissions of the *Furioso*'s narrator convey a similar idea of decentering, a displacement, not of the protagonist as in the central scene, but instead of the author: the weaving rhetoric (seen in *OF* 13.80 and 22.3) emerges as an excuse for the narrator's inability to overcome the disruptive agency of the tapestry's design, while in the final canto (46.1) the narrator imagines himself a hapless sailor dragged across the sea by the gods. If the text of the *Furioso* is represented in the forest of the central episode, carved in every corner with love notes about two other characters, then such an argument will correspond at least in part with the poem's other representations of itself, where even the narrator has found himself displaced.

A second inquiry into the validity of the intuition should concern extrapolability and determine whether the resulting interpretation works successfully with other moments of the same text. If the central episode represents the poem through the forest, can the forest then be understood as a cogent metaliterary symbol in other scenes? The *Furioso* offers countless scenes of transition that take place through encounters in the forest or otherwise pans from one forest locale to another — the first canto exemplifies the trope perfectly, as the third chapter of this dissertation will detail — such that these many forest spaces can easily be read as concretizations of the narrative interstices of the poem itself, marginal spaces serving only

to connect environments that will engender the proper action of the plot. Indeed, the entirety of the poem is bracketed by motion into the forest, from Angelica's flight from court in the poem's tenth stanza and Ruggiero's decision to prolong his stay in the woods (*OF* 45.81-92), in defiance of the poem's seemingly unhappy conclusion. The more the poem's readers can extrapolate from their intuition concerning the metaliterary valence of the central episode throughout the work, then, the more critical validity such a reading will acquire.

A final inquiry should concern coherence, comparing the one metaliterary intuition with another in the same text. For the *Furioso*, several other inventions have been productively interpreted as referring to some aspect of the work containing them. The stubbornly benevolent mage Atlante and the castles his sorcery has turned into prisons (described in *OF* 12.19-22, 13.50-79 and 22.14-23) have both been read as foils for the chivalric matrix as handled by its original Italian author, Matteo Maria Boiardo, whose *Orlando innamorato*, published between 1482 and 1483, Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* tacitly continues.²¹ Astolfo has likewise been proposed as a figure for the author.²² David Javitch has convincingly demonstrated that the notoriously frustrating leaps in action announced by the narrator of the *Furioso*, which Javitch terms "*cantus interruptus*", serve to remind readers of their own act of reading and the rational and even physiological expectations brought about by that act.²³ If all these interpretations are considered together, their sheer numerosity substantiates the idea that the *Furioso* is very much concerned with describing the experience

²¹ For a metaliterary reading of Atlante see David Quint, "The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poem", *MLN* 94.1 (1979): 77-91, 80-81. On the relationship between the *Furioso* and the *Innamorato* see Peter Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo: The Origins of Orlando Furioso* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 17-79. For the dating of the *Innamorato* see Riccardo Bruscaagli, "Introduzione", in Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando innamorato*, ed. Riccardo Bruscaagli (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 1:v-xxxiii, 1:v.

²² See Angelo Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 140-141.

²³ See Daniel Javitch, "*Cantus Interruptus* in the *Orlando Furioso*", *MLN* 95.1 (1980): 66-89, 70-71.

of composing and communicating its story, a thesis only further confirmed by the intuition about the metaliterary import of the central scene.

Chapter Summaries

The following chapters will each endeavor to substantiate a single overarching intuition concerning a particular work or set of works. The metaliterary character of Dante's *Commedia* is emblemized, as the first chapter will argue, in a subtle representation of the work being formed: the poem recounts not only the story of the pilgrim's ascent to the godhead, where he will see the source of the universe as a book (*Par.* 33.85-90), but it also tells the story of the poet's elevation to a truly divine poetics, which lets him see his whole book as a universe. Both of these journeys begin in the "selva oscura" (*Inf.* 1.2), which has been read allegorically as an extension of the pilgrim's perdition, but what significance might this setting simultaneously offer in the metanarrative comedy that runs parallel to the diegetic one? The forest here serves to describe a state of pre-material beginning — not the poet's beginning, but the poem's. As he does throughout the *Commedia*, Dante takes up the metaphors in common speech — such as *selva*, the Tuscan word for 'forest' that shares etymological roots with *materia*, a word used to describe raw subject matter — and literalizes them,²⁴ here imagining a forest that stands for the unformed narrative, still lacking direction, and that describes the conditions by which the real story can begin, in the third canto, the unofficial start of the *Inferno*.²⁵ The book's appearance as a universe thus completes the metaphor introduced by the *selva oscura*: the concept of the text as a divinely

²⁴ On the practice of literalization in the *Inferno* see John Freccero, *The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 105-109.

²⁵ Freccero writes that fourteenth-century readers readily understood canto 3 as the beginning of the first canticle proper; see *Poetics of Conversion*, 96.

ordered space, either chaotic and subject to animal impulses, as in the forest, or bound by a sense of benevolent unity, as in the final vision of the divine book.

The *Decameron* imagines that its hundred novellas are recounted in artfully manicured gardens but at the start of the ninth day, when no theme binds their storytelling, the narrators follow the direction of their queen to frolic in the forest (*Dec.* 8.ω.3-6). The second chapter of this dissertation will profit from a related intuition that the *Decameron* perpetuates and revises the links between woods and unorganized subject matter exploited by Dante. But within Boccaccio's tales, the forest setting also figures as an extension of the structures and rhythms of the relatively young novella genre. Emerging out of vernacular jokes and meditations that circulated in often one or two sentences,²⁶ the form of the novella was so dependent on brevity that the *Decameron* dedicates one of its ten days' worth of novellas, the sixth, to precisely this virtue (*Dec.* 5.ω.3). The novella's demand for brevity, verisimilitude and surprise offers authors the forest setting as a narrative system that can contribute almost autonomously to generate the outcome of the story. In one of the briefest tales of the *Decameron* — the seventh novella of the ninth day that, at fourteen sentences, is shorter than most of the tales told on the day explicitly dedicated to brevity — its protagonist Talano d'Imolese dreams that his wife will be attacked in the woods. The next day his prediction is realized almost as soon as she enters the forest, delivering an uncommonly swift conclusion to a tale that emphasizes the ecological features of the forest that can serve as a key for more complex tales. In a novella of the fifth day, a far more adventurous exploitation of the setting, two lovers elope into a forest outside Rome, where they encounter the indigenous inhabitants of the woods — political enemies (*Dec.* 5.3.10), brigands (5.3.31-32)

²⁶ For the history of the novella see Alfonso d'Agostino, "Itinerari e forme della prosa", in Enrico Malato, ed., *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Rome: Salerno, 1995-2004), 1:527-630, 573-622.

and wolves (5.3.43) — that they nonetheless overcome according to the predictable rhythms of daylight, hunger and greed. Lead the characters into the forest, Boccaccio seems to say throughout the *Decameron*, and the story seems to write itself.

With Ariosto, the story not only seems to have a hand in its own narration but indeed actively writes itself through the forests of the *Orlando furioso*, a poem that the third chapter will argue is greatly influenced by the narrative agency exerted by its forest environment. With a topography marked by circuitous paths, lit by an enchanted moon (*OF* 18.185-186) and peopled by helpful shepherds (19.23) and runaway horses (first seen in 1.73), the forest is an apt symbol for the narrative system of the *Furioso*, one that continually thwarts the trajectories of its desire-driven, automaton-like characters in order to forestall their inevitable conclusions and therefore perpetuate its own centrifugality.²⁷ In this regard, the forest that often connects these expansive episodes can be read as referring to the *Furioso*, a poem that opens with Angelica's headlong rush into the forest (*OF* 1.10) and closes with the long-deferred exit of Ruggiero out of the woods towards his foretold wedding (46.47-48). The forest quite literally narrates the story in the famous central scene, discussed above and in further detail below, in which Orlando actually becomes *furioso* by reading the forest's thousand trees and rocks recounting Angelica and Medoro's marriage in verses that contemporaneous printing techniques could not have distinguished from the general texture of the poem. Drawing on centuries of chivalric literature that had exploited the forest in the same way the *Decameron* had — namely, as a font of narrative generation that responds clearly to the needs of the author — the implicit but ubiquitous identification between the

²⁷ On desire as the motivating force for the characters of the *Furioso* see Eugenio Donato, “Per Selve e Boscherecci Labirinti”: Desire and Narrative Structure in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*”, in Patricia Parker and David Quint, eds., *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 33-62.

Furioso and the forest instead reveals the poem's interest in the vitality and limitations of narrative systems, those underlying patterns that control the weaving as much as the weaver.

Decades after the final edition of the *Furioso*, its centrifugal and titillating narrative still remained the model for chivalric poems in Italy and abroad and its shadow was nowhere darker than in Ariosto's own Ferrara, where a young Torquato Tasso set to reimagine the highly fashionable chivalric literature according to a radically moralizing poetics. In his Christian epic, the forest is cut down as soon as the Crusader protagonists arrive in Jerusalem (*GL* 3.74-76), as the only source of the lumber (3.56) for their necessary siege machines. The final chapter of this dissertation argues that Tasso's notably restricted treatment of the forest evidences his prioritization of the central military narrative over the individualist errant episodes typical of the forest-bound chivalric poem. The forest scenes in the *Liberata* repeatedly refer to lumber as *materia* (see *GL* 13.1, 13.17, 13.50, 18.3 and 18.41), the same term with which Tasso repeatedly describes unformed subject matter in his compositional treatise, the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* first published in 1587.²⁸ Read in light of Tasso's poetic manifesto, then, the Crusaders' quest to secure wooden *materia* comes to represent the poet's own search for a quantity of narrative *materia* sufficient to keep the unfailingly virtuous Christian protagonists from immediately winning the Crusade and thereby concluding the poem. As in Dante's *Commedia*, the trees here reveal the texture of a story awaiting formation but the *Liberata*'s obsession with instrumentalization²⁹ — the transformation of the forest into war machines, of errant factions into a united Crusader

²⁸ In the first two discourses, those which treat the selection and arrangement of poetic subject matter, the term recurs thirty-nine times, often qualified as "materia nuda", in reference to a work's "argomento"; see Torquato Tasso, *Arte poetica*, ed., 3-39. Four further instances refer to "quella che chiamano i naturali materia prima" and another is used to describe physical matter.

²⁹ Judith Butler uses this term to describe the teleology originally conjured by the classical Greek *ὑλη*; see *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 31.

army, of Muslim-controlled Jerusalem into a Christian city — will eventually cultivate empathy towards the objects of such exploitation. This sensitivity, which culminates in Tasso's inclusion of *tassi* among the trees felled for lumber (*GL* 3.76), reveals a mix of suspicion and empathy directed towards the *materia* not seen in Dante's poem.

This dissertation as a whole reads the forest settings in four works of literature as references to the work itself. Though each work effects its own unique connection between the forest and the text, the four metaliterary intuitions proposed here are each based on one of two connotations that the forest would have readily conjured in early modern Italy: the etymology of the Tuscan words related to forestry and the ecological characteristics of forest environments. The first link between the forest and the text describing it is that, in Tuscan, the word for forest (*selva*) and the word for rhetorical subject matter (*materia*) share an ancient etymological root, the classical Greek *ὕλη*, and this association relates most to Dante and Tasso. Inaugurating a poem he will fill with literalized metaphors, such as the literal storm of passions in canto 5 of *Inferno*, Dante chooses to represent the unformed subject matter of his poem with the literal meaning of that word: the forest. This metaliterary reading exposes readers to the narrative parallel to the pilgrim's journey, the story about the writing of the *Commedia* that concludes with a vision of the universe as a book. The word *materia* that abounds in the references to the forest setting of the *Liberata* likewise signals the metaliterary narrative being recounted alongside the diegetic narrative, where the quest for wooden material mirrors the narratological quest for subject matter. How this etymological association arrived to Dante and Tasso and what philosophical valences it acquired along the way can be easily demonstrated and will be outlined in the first chapter.

Requiring somewhat more substantiation and constituting the final section of this

introductory chapter is the second association that would have motivated the poets to link their narrative expression to the forest, which is based on the apparent disorderly dynamic of both system. This dissertation imagines that Boccaccio and Ariosto both conceived of their poem as a microcosm that, in its own way, resembles or behaves like a forest. The youth who declares that the *Decameron's* ninth day of storytelling will be free of thematic boundaries invites her companions to frolic in the pathless woods, first literally then figuratively. The countless settings of the *Furioso's* episodes are often connected by forests that pose obstacles and opportunities to characters progressing through it, inviting the reader to see in the interstitial spaces the very texture of the poem, even before the central episode is literally narrated by a forest covered in amorous engravings. If Boccaccio and Ariosto propose that their literary text is like a world and that world is like a forest, the particularities of each identification can only be fully appreciated after first understanding how a literary work behaves like a world and what characteristics of literary worlds might then be likened to forests, a field of inquiry introduced at the start of the second chapter.



With a dizzying number of avenues to pursue on the trail of a comprehensive history of the associations between worlds and literary works, the research in this dissertation will restrict itself to investigating the metaliterary character of the forest settings in fictive narratives of early modern Italy. The forest in the *Commedia*, as the following chapter will discuss, can be read as a productive metaliterary symbol by further investigating the metaphysical uses of the term *ὄλη* in Christian writing. The subsequent chapter uses Boccaccio's references to the proportionality and created nature of his forests enables inquiry into the view of literature his works perpetuate. Ariosto makes repeated mention of the interconnectedness and the ecological bounty of the forest and the plot of the *Furioso*, as the third chapter argues, seems

both to depend on its setting and admit its own dependence in representations of that setting. Tasso, finally, recreates the metaphysical baseness given to the forest by Dante but appears equally invested in representing the violence of such a hierarchy. Each argument will draw on one or more of the affinities between the forest and the literary work sketched here and in so doing they not only trace the history of this particular trope in the early modern Italian tradition but also contribute to a more systematic study of the use of setting to effect metaliterary commentary.

Chapter 1: Settings in the Self-Conscious *Commedia*

“He is inspired
to write a long poem about Paradise
and hell. About Ohm’s law. About
thermal energy. He names the poem.

“Straight Out of You.””

Frank Lima, *Dante and Beatrice are 57 Today*³⁰



This chapter, like the three that follow it, investigates the forest settings of one work of early modern Italian literature for their potential to represent the work in which they appear. The present study focuses on Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia* and advances two metaliterary readings of the limited presence of the forest in that poem. The first reading proposes that the “selva oscura” (*Inf.* 1.2) in the opening canto and the “divina foresta” (*Purg.* 28.2) atop Mount Purgatory mark phases in a metaliterary narrative about the invention and production of the *Commedia*, a narrative that concludes with the triumphant vision of the divine presence as a book. Within this metaliterary narrative, the “selva oscura” reflects the nature of the poem before being elevated from the dark, compromising material of Dante’s younger poetics. Animating the metaliterary schema traced by these three settings is a second reading of a single episode, that of the condemned soul Pier delle Vigne, who poignantly describes his transformation from dynamic person to fixed character in the forest of suicides in *Inferno* 13. The character’s validation of the divine system of justice organizing the entire diegetic ecology of the *Commedia* thus confirms the hierarchy constituted by the sequence of metaliterary settings: the uniqueness of the biographical, historical and cultural *materia* must submit to the dictates of formal poetic expression. Beyond its contributions to the scholarly understanding of the self-consciousness of the *Commedia*, the present narrow study of but one facet of Dante’s “thirteen-thousand-faceted” form will also serve as a starting point for

³⁰ Frank Lima, “Dante and Beatrice are 57 Today”, *Massachusetts Review* 38.3 (1997): 339-341.

this dissertation's larger objective:³¹ that of tracing the various moralized links between the forest and poetic expression that had persisted for centuries before Dante ever imagined his *selva oscura* in the thought of Aristotle and Augustine and that will recur in, among other texts, Angelo Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, as is demonstrated in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Woods and Words

The literary philosophy that will be exemplified by the *selva oscura* and by Pier delle Vigne finds its expression through the forest setting and the characters' interaction with it. As with many constructions in the *Commedia*, the forest exerts its metaliterary meaning through the literalizing a metaphor from common speech. Examples of literalization abound in the *Commedia*. Many of the *contrappassi* the condemned souls in the *Commedia* must undergo, like the storm of passions that controls Paolo and Francesca da Rimini in *Inferno* 5, are realizations of the poetry of everyday language. Even Virgilio, the fictional Vergil who directs the pilgrim through the afterlife, literalizes his role of metaphoric guide for Dante the poet. The forest of suicides, described four times using the word *selva*,³² perpetuates a literalization of the varied etymological associations of *selva* and related words that is initiated in the poem's second verse with the "selva oscura" where the pilgrim awakens. Given that these associations will be the basis for this chapter's investigation of the forest in both *Inferno* 1 and 13, they merit a thorough presentation here.

The *selva oscura* of the *Commedia* may have most fully realized the three chief

³¹ In his essay on the *Commedia* Osip Mandelstam imagines "how it would be if bees had worked at the creation of this thirteenth-thousand-faceted shape" ("как если бы над созданием тринадцатитысячегранника работали пчелы"); see his "Разговор о Данте", §3, in *Полное собрание сочинений и писем* (Moscow: Прогресс-Плеяда, 2009-2014), 2:413-454, 2:422. For the translation see "Conversation on Dante", tr. Clarence Brown and Robert Hughes, in Osip Mandelstam, *Selected Essays*, ed. Sidney Monas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 3-46, 15.

³² See *Inf.* 13.97, 13.108, 13.117 and 13.124.

meanings of the word *selva* but Dante’s triumphant literalization borrows its vocabulary and imagery from the most authoritative figures of antiquity and a condensed meditation on literature, morality and the organization of the cosmos, all fields in which the word *selva* or its Latin and Greek forebears exert a specific and important function. The Tuscan word *selva* derives from the Latin *silva*, less often spelled *sylva* in apparent imitation of Greek orthography. *Silva* is in turn a Latin translation of the Greek ὕλη, possibly formed from an archaic root (*συλφη [*sylfe] → *συλη [*syle] → ὕλη [hyle]).³³ This last term, the Greek ὕλη, was the subject of much rhetorical extension in antiquity, embracing figurative uses that may have been obscure or even cliché to fourteenth-century speakers of Italian vernaculars but that the *Commedia* seeks to literalize in its forest.

In classical Greek, ὕλη referred to any number of wooden resources — ‘forest’, ‘woodland’, ‘wood’, ‘copse’, ‘firewood’, ‘fuel’ and ‘timber’³⁴ — but always connoted an eventual use value in human construction and consumption. Judith Butler writes that the “Greek *hyle* is wood that already has been cut from trees”, if not physically then conceptually, and therefore always refers to something essentially “instrumentalized and instrumentalizable, artifactual, on the way to being put to use”.³⁵ Such a teleology of instrumentalization is evident in a preclassical example of the literal, arboreal meanings of ὕλη, the *Works and Days* attributed to the poet figure Hesiod from the seventh century BCE. Here, in a description of autumn woodcutting, the noun ὕλη accompanies the derivate verb ὑλοτομεῖν, ‘to hew’:

[...] at that time, wood that is cut with the iron [τμηθεῖσα σιδήρῳ / ὕλη] is

³³ For the etymology see the entry in Ottorino Pianigiani, ed., *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana* (Rome/Milan: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1907), s.v. “selva”. Alternate theories suggest the Latin *silva* derived from *σίλφη*, the Greek word describing beetles and a number of other insects.

³⁴ For definitions and usage see Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, in Gregory Crane, ed., *Perseus Digital Library*, perseus.tufts.edu (2007), s.v. “ὕλη”.

³⁵ See *Bodies that Matter*, 31-32, italics original.

least bitten by worms, and its leaves fall to the ground and it ceases putting forth shoots. So at that time be mindful and cut wood [ύλοτομεῖν], a seasonable work [...].³⁶

To speakers of classical Greek, then, ύλη always implied its own promise as a substance.

From the relationship between ύλη and its potential constructions derives the figurative extension of ύλη as subject matter, the ‘stuff’ of verbal constructions. The only occurrence of ύλη in Plato’s *Timaeus* (composed between 367-347 BCE),³⁷ for instance, bears this meaning and describes the categories (“γένη”) out of which his account (“λόγον”) will be “woven” (“συνυφανθῆναι”): this raw content is “lying before us and thoroughly sifted—like wood [ύλη] ready for the joiner [τέκτοσιν]”.³⁸ Suetonius reports that in the first century BCE the rhetorician Ateius Praetextatus or Philologus of Roman Athens asked his secretary, “hysten nostram aliis [...] commendare, quam omnis generis coegimus, uti scis, octingentos in libros”,³⁹ which suggests that ύλη circulated as a term for artless expository writing at least by late Republican Rome. Aulus Gellius later mentions the *silva* as one of the “titulos [...] exquisitissimos” in fashion for second-century miscellanies.⁴⁰ As will be discussed later in this dissertation, this second, figurative meaning as a miscellany genre enjoyed a long fortune in the Latin-speaking world and constitutes the origin of one of the two major cultural links between the forest and literature.

But a third meaning was assigned to ύλη that would change its semantic character even in classical Greece. Aristotle is credited as the first Greek writer to use ύλη to describe a

³⁶ See Hesiod, *Works and Days*, in *Hesiod*, tr. and ed. Glenn Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1:86-153, vv. 420-422.

³⁷ For the dating of the *Timaeus* see Francis MacDonald Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato translated with a Running Commentary* (London: Routledge, 1937), 1.

³⁸ See Plato, *Timaeus* 69A, tr. and ed. Robert Gregg Bury, in *Plato*, gen. ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 9:16-253.

³⁹ See Suetonius, *De grammaticis et rhetoribus*, ed. Robert Kaster (Clarendon: Oxford, 1995), §10.

⁴⁰ See Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, revised ed., tr. and ed. John Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946-1952), a.6.

state of metaphysical matter that precedes formal expression.^{□41} Uses of the term recur frequently in his lectures on the materiality of the soul,^{□42} where it signifies a potential only actualizable with the impression of a proper form (*μορφή*). By theorizing a hierarchy and by positing a dependence of the material potentiality on the specific form that realizes the potential perfection through an act of entelechy, Aristotle's recourse to the term *ὑλη* perfectly reflects his revision of Plato's materialism, specifically the relationship between the components of material formation. In his *Timaeus*, Plato had imagined matter as an autonomous *χώρα*, a receptacle or space that receives the ideal impression for a being from without.^{□43} In the words of the character Timaeus in Plato's text,

the substance which is to receive within itself all the kinds [*γένη*] should be void of all forms [*εἰδῶν*]; just as with all fragrant ointments, men bring about this condition by artistic contrivance and make the liquids which are to receive the odours as odourless as possible.⁴⁴

Reception and nurturing thus characterize the agency of the unformed matter in Platonic thought.

Aristotle's divergence from Plato's vocabulary of reception in favor of *ὑλη* substitutes the independence of the unformed substance with a relational nature forever dependent on a formal actualization. His revision of Platonic matter stresses this relationship repeatedly: "Matter [*ὑλη*], in the chief and strictest sense of the word, is the substratum [*δεκτικόν*] which

⁴¹ For the usage of *ὑλη* see Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary*, in Gregory Crane, ed., *Perseus Digital Library*, perseus.tufts.edu (2007), s.v. "silva". See also Friedrich Solmsen, "Aristotle's Word for 'Matter'", in Sesto Prete, ed., *Didascaliae: Studies in Honor of Anselm M. Albareda, Prefect of the Vatican Library, Presented by a Group of American Scholars* (New York: Rosenthal, 1961), 393-408, 400-402.

⁴² For examples of *ὑλη* in Aristotle see *On Coming-to-be and Passing-Away* 320a in Edward Seymour Forster's edition in *Aristotle*, gen. ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 3:162-329; *Metaphysics* 1042a and 1045a in Hugh Tredennick's edition in *Aristotle*, gen. ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 17:2-18:303; and *On the Soul* 412a in Walter Stanley Hett's edition, *On the Soul*, 2nd ed., in *Aristotle*, gen. ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 8:8-203.

⁴³ See *Timaeus* 51A.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Timaeus* 50E.

admits of coming-to-be and passing-away”.⁴⁵ Aristotle’s figurative use of *ύλη* coheres perfectly with his teleological conception of matter: just as tree fibers can only be understood as wood when there are potential uses for it, so too does matter become material only in relation to a process of making. Definitions abound in Aristotelian metaphysical writing which contextualize *ύλη* in a larger process of realization: he pronounces that “by matter [*ύλην*] I mean that which is not actually, but is potentially, an individual thing” and explains in a later analogy that the mysterious “unification of ‘round’ and ‘bronze’” of a cloak is only explained when they are seen as participating in the same act of materialization, namely, that “one is matter [*ύλη*] and the other form [*μορφή*]”.⁴⁶ In *On the Soul*, likely composed after his metaphysical principles had been thoroughly demonstrated in other lectures, he is even more succinct: “Matter [*ύλη*] is potentiality, while form [*εἶδος*] is realization or actuality”.⁴⁷ This *ύλη* diverges from the Platonic vocabulary, then, in that it does not receive all potential archetypes but is tied to its formal counterpart by a sort of aptitude. For Aristotle, then, *ύλη* never stands alone but always in juxtaposition to its potential formal realization.

As Friedrich Solmsen notes, Aristotle’s particular metaphysical valorization of *ύλη* would dramatically influence later thinkers, projecting onto the term a putative formlessness that only an expert naturalist like Theophrastus could overturn.⁴⁸ Aristotle’s shadow only grew longer as the three concepts conjured by *ύλη* were translated into two separate Latin words. Though its etymology remains a mystery, the meanings assigned to the Latin *silva* are well documented and embrace the literal and more collective figurative extensions of *ύλη*,[□] signifying primarily forests, groves and foliage, but also thick heaps, a metaphor used in

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *On Coming-to-be and Passing-Away* 320a.

⁴⁶ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1042a and 1045a.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *On the Soul* 412a.

⁴⁸ “Aristotle’s Word for ‘Matter’”, 395-396.

classic literature as in the thicket of arrows imagined in Vergil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *De bello civile*.⁴⁹ *Materia*, a word related to the vocabulary of motherhood, acquired most of the abstract nuances of *ὑλη*, both physical, as in 'substance' or 'building matter', and also figurative, as in 'cause' or 'occasion'.⁵⁰ Roman literary terminology illustrates the bifurcation effected in Latinizing the rhetorical valences of *ὑλη*: while the shapeless *materia* was used to refer to the subject treated by a given work, *silva* came to refer to a genre of unadorned occasional writing, the content of which exerted such priority that it served as its own form, at least nominally. Quintilian illustrates the distinction when he describes writers who "primo decurrere per materiam stilo quam velocissimo volunt et sequentes calorem atque impetum ex tempore scribunt; hanc silvam vocant".⁵¹ Though the Roman writers Ateius and Lucan had earlier used the terms *hyle* and *silva* to refer to their collected works,⁵² as seen above, Statius exploited the term most openly for his volume of occasional poetry, entitled *Silvae*, and even referenced the heat and speed from Quintilian's definition in his prologues.⁵³ The *silva* genre solidified the gulf between the textual extensions of the original *ὑλη*: enough *materia* could produce the still perfunctory generic identity of a *silva*, though a lack of formal finitude was still implicit in each term.

A similar bifurcation influenced the Latinization of the metaphysical valences of the Greek *ὑλη*. In the first Latin commentaries on classical materialist texts, all metaphysical

⁴⁹ See Vergil, *Aeneid* 10.886-887, in *Virgil*, tr. Henry Rushton Fairclough, ed. George Patrick Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000), 1:262-2:367; and Lucan, *The Civil War*, tr. Duff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 10.201-206.

⁵⁰ For the etymology and usage see Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "materia".

⁵¹ See Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, tr. and ed. Harold Edgeworth Butler (London / New York: Heinemann / Putnam, 1920-1922), 10:3.17.

⁵² On Lucan's lost *silvae* see David Bright, *Elaborate Disarray: The Nature of Statius' Silvae* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1980), 35-37.

⁵³ See Bright, *Elaborate Disarray*, 29. Bright cites the preface to Statius's first book of *Silvae*; see Statius, "Statius to his friend Stella", in *Silvae*, tr. and ed. David Roy Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 26-29.

matter was routinely given as *silva*. Calcidius’s fourth-century commentary on the *Timaeus* overwhelmingly prefers *silva* in its discussions of both Platonic and Aristotelian theories, using it as a stand-alone signifier for the title of the thirteenth *liber* of his commentary, “De silva”, the last and lengthiest of the twenty-seven subjects he announces will be treated.⁵⁴ In fact, Calcidius dwells on the absence of the term *ὕλη* from Plato’s *Timaeus*:

Nunc [...] de silva tractabitur, quam originem fore rerum consentiunt Pythagorei Platonici Stoici. Nomen vero ei dederunt auditores Platonis ipse enim nusquam silvae nomen ascripsit sed aliis multis ad declarationem naturae eius convenientibus nuncupat mentis usus est, cum animis nostris intimare vellet intellectum eius utcumque, vel ex natura propria rei vel ex passionibus commotionibusque animorum nostrorum, ex natura quidem propria ‘primam materiam’ nuncupans et item ‘simile’ quiddam ‘mollis cedentisque materiae in quam imprimuntur signacula et rerum receptaculum’ et interdum ‘matrem’ atque ‘nutriculam totius generationis’, ex passione vero audientium, cum dicit ‘adulterino quodam intellectu recordandam et contiguam sine tangentium sensu’.⁵⁵

Calcidius’s lengthy explanation of Plato’s preference for descriptive terms over the more technical *silva* (that is, *ὕλη*) underlines that the weight of the missing word. Calcidius’s syntax demonstrates this as well, in that the noun *silva* requires no qualification, while the banality and neutrality of *materia* demand the amplification of adjectives (“primam materiam”, “mollis cedentisque materiae” and, later in the treatise, “materiam principalem”).⁵⁶ In the earliest Latin texts to work with the translations of *ὕλη*, then, *silva* was able to hold significant weight on its own, while *materia* exerted relatively little semantic force.

A slightly different story is offered by the early Christian writer Isidore of Seville,

⁵⁴ Calcidius names twenty-seven sections in the “ordinatio libri et species”; see *Platonis Timaeus interprete Chalcidio cum eiusdem commentario*, ed. Johann Wrobel (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1963), §7. One paragraph prior (§6), he refers to the sections that will follow “in illis libris”. The thirteenth *liber* corresponds to §268-355. On the unfinished status of Calcidius’s commentary see Jacobus van Winden, *Calcidius on Matter: His Doctrine and Sources; A Chapter in the History of Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 14.

⁵⁵ *Platonis Timaeus interprete Chalcidio* §308. For Calcidius’s commentary on Aristotle, where he again prefers *silva*, see §283-288 and §286-288 for Aristotelian *silva* in particular. See also Winden, *Calcidius on Matter*, 75-92.

⁵⁶ *Platonis Timaeus interprete Chalcidio* §316.

whose encyclopedic *Etymologiarum* or *Originum libri*, composed around 615,⁵⁷ offered, the first lexical survey of the ancient terms with the retrospective of several centuries and thereby helped shape the early modern understanding of the ancients' own conception of their words. In the entry on *ὕλη*, Isidore rehabilitates *materia* by making that term, not *silva*, the feature of his definition but he also undercuts this centrality by stressing the banal character of *materia*, a word used rather indiscriminately in Latin:

*Υλη [sic] Graeci rerum quandam primam materiam dicunt, nullo prorsus modo formatam, sed omnium corporalium formarum capacem, ex qua visibilia haec elementa formata sunt; unde ex eius derivatione vocabulum acceperunt. Hanc Latini materiam appellaverunt, ideo qui omne informe, unde aliquid faciendum est, semper materia nuncupatur. Proinde et eam poetae silvam nominaverunt, nec incongrue, quia materia silvarum sunt.*⁵⁸

Aside from the imbalance between the repetition and the weight attributed to the term, Isidore's definition is also remarkable for its formulation of *materia* as a lack of *forma*. Minimized in his categorization of Greek materialism is the sense of autonomous, spatial unity that persists in the Platonic receptacle. Isidore's Aristotelianizing definition thus emphasizes both the dependence of matter on its missing form, mentioning *forma* once for each of the four mentions of *materia*, as well the activity of making ("unde aliquid faciendum est"). As will be demonstrated in this and the fourth chapter of this dissertation, the Italian writers who inherited Latinity through Isidore's mediation similarly perceived *materia* through the prism of form and activity, the raw stuff awaiting the active implantation of a form.

Indeed, the emergence of Italian vernacular literature completed the polarization of substantiality between the terms *silva* and *materia* was complete. In Tuscan, *materia* carries

⁵⁷ For the dating of the *Etymologiarum libri* see Manuel Diaz y Diaz, "Introducción general", in Isidore of Seville, *Etimologías*, tr. and ed. Jose Oroz Reta and Manuel-Antonio Marcos Casquero (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982), 1-257, 163-164.

⁵⁸ *Etymologiarum sive originum libri*, ed. Wallace Martin Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 13.3.1.

the same flaccid meanings of the Latin homograph, as the first Italian dictionary demonstrates. Begun in 1591 and published in 1612, after the composition of all the works under consideration in this dissertation, the *Vocabolario dell'Accademia della Crusca* looks back to Dante, Boccaccio and Francesco Petrarca for its definition of “materia”:

Soggetto, o principio di qualunque componimento, o cosa sensibile, o intelligibile. Lat. *materia, materies*.

[*Par.* 1.127-129:] Ver' è, che come forma non s' accorda Molte fiata alla 'ntenzion dell' arte, Perchè a risponder la materia è sorda. [*Par.* 5.52-54:] L' altra che per materia t' è aperta, Puote bene esser tal, che non si falla, Se con altra materia si converta.

[*Dec.* 3.3.13:] Che in niuno atto ho l' animo disposto a tal materia. [*Dec.* 3.5.22:] E acciocchè io non t' abbia altra volta a far parlar di questa materia. [*Dec.* 2.9.13:] Che ti farebbono, sopra questa materia, più temperatamente parlare. [*Dec.* 4.1.1:] Fiera materia di ragionare n' ha oggi il nostro Re data.

[*Inf.* 20.2:] E dar materia al ventesimo canto Della prima canzon.

[*Dec.* 3.2.19:] Datale materia di desiderare altra volta quello, che già sentito avea.

[Francesco Allegri, ed., *Della compunzione del cuore* 2.6, in *Volgarizzamento di alcuni opuscoli di s. Giovan Grisostomo*:] Lo provoco Iddio a penitenza, e aspettoe, e dielli molte materie, e cagioni di convertirsi.

[*RVF* 28.45:] Furon materia a sì giusto disdegno.⁵⁹

Encompassing the notions of physical matter, rhetorical matter and occasion, the set of examples presented here all betray a pronounced abstraction. The uses of the Tuscan word *materia* by the earliest of this dissertation's four authors cited in the Crusca definition also demonstrate a marked connection to verbal production.

As with the Latin *silva*, the Tuscan word *selva* connotes considerably more substance than its twin *materia*, a polarity perhaps best seen in Tasso's late sixteenth-century remark that a poet must select a plot from the “grandissima selva de la materia poetica”.⁶⁰ A generation after Tasso, the Crusca *Vocabolario* will again look back to the fourteenth-century masters for a definition of “selva” that prescribes only the meaning ‘forest’, far and away the

⁵⁹ See Accademia della Crusca, *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, vocabolario.sns.it/html/index.html, in Massimo Fanfani and Marco Biffi, eds., *Accademia della Crusca in rete*, accademiadellacrusca.it (2004), s.v. “materia”, italics original.

⁶⁰ See the second discourse in Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi del poema eroico*, in *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*, ed. Luigi Poma (Bari: Laterza, 1964), 57-259, 79.

principal usage reported in literature from this period:

Boscaglia grande. Lat. *sylva*. gr. *ὄλη*.

[*Dec.* 5.3.11:] E come seppe, verso una selva grandissima volse il suo ronzino.

[*Inf.* 1.5:] Ah quanto a dir qual' era è cosa dura Esta selva selvaggia, e aspra, e forte. [*Inf.* 20.129:] Alcuna volta, per la selva fonda.

[*RVF* 323.51:] Vedendo per la selva altera, e sola.⁶¹

The rare poetic extension likewise conjures a conglomeration of things: Ariosto and Tasso both imagine a thicket of arrows, a phrasing likely borrowed from Vergil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁶² The most prominent exception to this semantic restriction would be the successful figurative extension as a generic title for collections of occasional poetry, deriving from a classical practice exemplified by Statius and Lucan. Italian examples include Lorenzo de' Medici's vernacular *Selve*, a vision narrative in octaves begun in 1473,⁶³ but a much more thorough introduction to the *silva* genre was offered to early modern Italian intellectuals by Angelo Poliziano in the 1480s.

Poliziano and the *silva* model of anthology will return in this dissertation's fourth chapter, in the discussion of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century extensions of terms derived from *ὄλη*. But back in the early fourteenth century, before the rise of anthologies styled as forests, the principle meanings available to the Italian word *selva* are the three outlined above: the literal referent of a forest environment and the two figurative extension of verbal subject matter and metaphysical material potential. Each of the four poets studied in this dissertation links the environment, text and philosophy, using their representations of the forest to comment on the philosophy of literature espoused by the very work they are each currently composing. While Boccaccio and Ariosto effect this triangulation by focusing on

⁶¹ See Accademia della Crusca, *Vocabolario*, s.v. "selva", italics original.

⁶² See, respectively, *OF* 18.22; *GL* 18.76; *Aeneid* 10.886-887; and *Civil War* 10.201-206.

⁶³ For the dating of the *Selve* see Paolo Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva", in Lorenzo de' Medici, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Paolo Orvieto (Rome: Salerno, 1992), 535-540, 536-537.

the ecological character of the forest, which presents structures and dynamics analogous to those of the novella and epic forms of narrative, Dante and Tasso instead profit from words used to name the forest, *silva* and *materia*, respectively. They are not the only poets to use the forest setting as literary instrument: Robert Harrison's monograph uncovers symbolic functionality in the forests of Western masterpieces from *Gilgamesh* onward while Ernst Curtius documents the establishment of forest settings as generic furniture for lyric, spiritual and narrative poetry in the centuries before vernacular literature flourished in Europe. But few forests in the European literary imagination combine their symbolism with their attempts to conform to and perpetuate generic expectations, fashioning an elaborate symbol for the system of literary representation itself.

This metaliterary impulse is what separates the inventions of Dante, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Tasso from the countless writers that imagined the forest before them. More specifically, it is the depth and relevance of these inventions to the character of the work as a whole that distinguishes the four cases studied in this dissertation, since even before Dante an Italian poet can be seen to present the forest as a critique of thematic conformity. In the first stanza of a late thirteenth-century canzone by Bonagiunta Orbicciani of Lucca, a grouping of trees can be read as metonymy for the overwhelmingly conventional practices of lyric poetry in the generation before a group of Tuscan poets, among them Dante, would give body to a new spirit of referentially expansive poetry.

The distance Bonagiunta's speaker interposes between himself and the sonorous space of the forest is worth considering:

Quando apar l'aulente fiore,
lo tempo dolse e sereno,
gli auceletti infra gli albore
ciascun canta in suo latino,
per lo dolse canto e fino

si confortan gli amadore,
quegli ch'aman lealmente:
 ëo, lasso, no rifino,
[e] per quella c'ha 'l meo core
va[o] pensoso infra la gente.⁶⁴

The highly musical forest presented in Bonagiunta's poem appears to function as the environmental orientation or *Natureingang* espoused by numerous Provençal love lyricists,⁶⁵ whom the first generations of Italian vernacular poets imitated almost exclusively, but this construction is quickly deflated when the speaker reveals himself in a distant, crowded city. Much of Bonagiunta's opening construction is conventional, including the vocabulary used to describe the forest chronotope and borrowed from his predecessors in Provençal and Sicilian poetry.⁶⁶ Even his deflation of this convention is itself somewhat conventional, as the troubadours ironized their own clichés: the late twelfth-century Azalais de Porcairague, for example, founds her song in frost and slush in the season when “e·l aucellet estan mut”.⁶⁷ What aligns Bonagiunta with Azalais and thereby distinguishes him from the poets of the young Italian vernacular tradition is his presentation of a landscape parallel to the world of poetic stock images. Bonagiunta's speaker passes mournfully “infra la gente” while the birds flittering “infra gli albore” sing of typical love, and no other organic element — indeed, no other non-abstract noun — will recur in this canzone, save for the “dolze criatura” that his other poems confirm as a preferred periphrasis for the beloved.⁶⁸ When other Tuscan poets effect similar imbalances, they do so always within the charming world of poetic fantasy, like

⁶⁴ See canzone 1 in Bonagiunta Orbicciani of Lucca, *Rime*, ed. Aldo Menichetti (Florence: Galluzzo, 2012).

⁶⁵ On the technique of the *Natureingang* see Marisa Galvez, “Natureingang”, in Roland Greene, ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 922-923.

⁶⁶ Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola's signal citations of Guilhèm de Peitieu, Giacomo da Lentini and Giacomino Pugliese; see their *Antologia della poesia italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1:131-133.

⁶⁷ See her canso in Oskar Schultz-Gora's *Die provenzalischen Dichterinnen: Biographien und Texte* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1975), 16-17.

⁶⁸ The repetition of the preposition “infra” is essential for the creation of parallel spaces but Amos Parducci's edition dampens the echo, giving “imfra” in the last line; see *I rimatori lucchesi del secolo XIII: Bonagiunta Orbicciani · Gonnella Antelminelli · Bonodico · Bartolomeo · Fredi · Dotto Reali* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1905), 24. The *dolze criatura* is first mentioned in verse 17.

the unwilling bride of the so-called Compiuta Donzella's *A la stagion che 'l mondo foglia e fiora*, unhappily surrounded by pretty flowers and leaves.⁶⁹ By taking his reader into a forest of people and away from a forest of stock images, Bonagiunta is thus perhaps the first Italian-language poet to have used the image of the forest to affect metaliterary commentary, here a critique of the restricted imagery and thematics of the earliest Italian poetics. While Eliza Ghil notes that troubadours for centuries before him used the *Natureingang* to mark the historicity of the lyric performance⁷⁰ — ‘this is happening’ — Bonagiunta appears to be the earliest Italian poet to highlight not just the historicity but also the artifice of his poem, telling his listeners, ‘this poetic construct is happening’. It is likely Bonagiunta's disappointed vision of contemporaneous Italian poetry, encapsulated in this speaker's urban forest of people, that prompted Dante to make the character of Bonagiunta's purgatorial soul define the poetry that would follow him as relatively sweet and novel, a “dolce stil novo” (*Purg.* 24.57), the label still in use by critics today.

As with the other works studied in this dissertation, Dante's masterpiece reflects his comprehensive consumption of classical and vernacular literature and compresses into his inventions many of these connections between the forest and the practice of verbal communication. The following section will investigate their role, along with that of other premodern sources specific to Dante's program, in establishing the *selva oscura* as the first in a series of metaliterary settings.

The Forest as Literalization

The *Commedia* is a fundamentally self-referential poem, as its first two tercets illustrate:

⁶⁹ See Gianfranco Contini, ed., *Poeti del Duecento* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1995), 1.1:433.

⁷⁰ See “The Seasonal Topos in the Old Provençal *canzo*: A Reassessment”, in Hans Erich Keller, ed., *Studia occitcanica in memoriam Paul Remy* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University/Medieval Institute, 1986), 87-99.

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la dritta via era smarrita.
Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura (*Inf.* 1.4-6).

The alternation in verb tense succinctly distinguishes the two narratives that the poem will compose: the past-tense diegetic narrative, which describes the pilgrim's journey to the godhead, and the present-tense metaliterary narrative that offers running commentary about the poet's ascent to a purely spiritual poetics. The prominence of the story the *Commedia* tells about its own composition is the most explicit aspect of its literary self-awareness. In this sense, the *Commedia* is a story about writing an unwriteable story and readers interested in the construction of its overt meditation on the challenge of poetic representation have no shortage of material to examine. Though the poet makes only one direct reference to the form of his poem — opening the twentieth canto with an explicit enumeration and a delineation of the subject matter it will treat⁷¹ — descriptions of the composition of the *Commedia* nonetheless abound. Inviting readers to distinguish the literal and metaphorical layers of the text, the poet presents his poem as “quel ver c' ha faccia di menzogna” (*Inf.* 16.124). He openly struggles to depict subject matter that defies representation, especially in the canticle of heaven where he sees “cose che ridire / né sa né può chi di là sù discende”.⁷² At other times, as in the second tercet in the poem, the metaliterary narrative interrupts the diegetic narrative as a result of the intensity of the emotions it awakens in the poet.

So while the *Commedia* tells two unique stories, one about the pilgrim's journey and another about the poet's struggle to depict that journey, its artistry lies in telling them in the same single work of literature. The two narratives and their distinct temporal planes are

⁷¹ See *Inf.* 20.1-3: “Di nova pena mi conven far versi / e dar matera al ventesimo canto / de la prima canzon, ch'è d'i sommersi”.

⁷² See *Par.* 1.4. For other admissions of ineffability in the *Commedia* see *Inf.* 26.1-3 and *Par.* 17.118.

bridged by the revolutionary decision to make the protagonist of each the same person. While diegetic narrative poetry and autobiography were already established genres by the thirteenth century — with Vergil and Augustine as the models most dear to Dante — the marriage of the two literary modes had never been negotiated by the shared identity of one protagonist, a single figure privy to two simultaneous narratives.⁷³ As Albert Russell Ascoli describes, the relationship between the pilgrim's and the poet's narratives is not parallel, but constitutive:

the experience of the first-person Dante is the subject of the first-person Dante's poetry. The *poeta* makes the *personaggio* visible — authors him — but at the same time the journey of the *personaggio* provides not only the subject matter for the *poeta*, but also the story of how the individual called Dante became capable of writing the *Commedia*.⁷⁴

Though these narratives often alternate their claim on the reader's attention, as in the first two stanzas, their shared ambition — that of crafting a Christian epic out of worldly experience — means that the narratives can also be advanced simultaneously, when the literal level of the diegetic narrative of the pilgrim's journey can be read for its potential correspondence with the metaliterary narrative by intuiting statements about the poetic process and the identity of the *Commedia* as it is being written.

The main focus of this study will take up this second sort of entrée into the metaliterary narrative, which will be investigated not through the poet's explicit statements about the task of writing but instead in the moments of the *Commedia* when the metaliterary narrative is simultaneously readable through the diegetic narrative. Perhaps the most famous example of such a doubly significant invention is the inscription above the gates of hell in *Inferno* 3:

⁷³ On the revolutionary aspect of the *Commedia*'s autobiography see Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, 2.

⁷⁴ Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 305, italics original.

Per me si va ne la città dolente,
per me si va ne l'eterno dolore,
per me si va tra la perduta gente.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;
fecemi la divina podestate,
la somma sapienza e 'l primo amore.
Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create
se non eterne, e io eterna duro.
Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate (*Inf.* 3.1-9).

To fourteenth-century readers facing a text that predated the typographical conventions of quotation marks and italicization, this arresting passage would indeed have comprised an uncanny “‘photograph’ from the other world”, in which the inscription is indistinguishable from the diegetic narrative that represents it.⁷⁵ By presenting verses that appear to speak in the first-person stead of the poem itself, this passage succeeds through an absolute overlap of the diegetic and metaliterary narratives: the text can be read diegetically, as an inscription addressed to characters in that setting, but also in a metaliterary key, as the poem speaking to its readers. Even after these disembodied verses are contextualized within the diegetic narrative as “parole di colore oscuro” (*Inf.* 3.10) inscribed “al sommo d’una porta” (3.11) that faces the pilgrim and his guide, the fictive inscription on the gates of hell can still be read as a metaliterary admission by the very fiction that has imagined those gates, since it is also true that, in order to advance with the poem that describes the city of pain within the poem, readers must necessarily heed this announcement themselves.⁷⁶

The simultaneity of this infernal inscription is due to its positioning at the opening of the canto, prior to the reader’s determination that the passage should belong to either the diegetic or the metaliterary narrative and, as such, this passage is a superlative example of the potential to read advancement the *Commedia*’s two stories in the same episode. But overlaps

⁷⁵ The description is Lino Pertile’s; see his “Introduction to *Inferno*”, in Rachel Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67-90, 70.

⁷⁶ For a further reading of the metaliterary functionality of this passage see Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, 93-109.

of the diegetic and metaliterary narratives are found throughout the entire *Commedia*, as William Franke demonstrates in his monograph on the pilgrim's acts of interpretation that recur at his every encounter between the pilgrim and characters in the afterlife.⁷⁷ As the pilgrim asks each soul how their situation reflects the divine organization of the afterlife, the replying character can be heard explaining and justifying the organization of the poetic cosmos in which they have been carefully positioned. The objective of Franke's study is to link the presence of interpretation in the poem to Dante's spiritual hermeneutics and his philosophy of history -- rather than to investigate it for its metaliterary functionality, the interest of this dissertation -- but nonetheless his study establishes a simultaneity between the story of the pilgrim and the story of the poet that is central to the arguments that follow here.

Beyond constructions that alert readers to metaliterary significance through their position or their deliberate representation of communicative acts, there is an additional aspect to Dante's *Commedia* that further encourages readers to imagine his diegetic narrative as exhibiting metaliterary import, namely, the reference to divine order legible in every element in the afterlife, what Michel Foucault describes as the "signatures" by which early modern cosmologies were constructed and analyzed.⁷⁸ As Franke details, the majority of the plot in the diegetic narrative of the *Commedia* concerns the pilgrim's deduction of this divine logic by interrogating the dead souls about their transgressions and sufferings.⁷⁹ But the pilgrim is also given extensive instruction into the spatial organization of the afterlife which also reflects the characteristics of the divine will, from which all things are necessarily extensions. To a great extent the diegetic narrative of the *Commedia* already presents a character, the

⁷⁷ See his monograph *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially 16-18.

⁷⁸ See *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 40-45.

⁷⁹ *Dante's Interpretive Journey*, 9.

pilgrim, who is perpetually interpreting a text, that is, the world marked in all places with the poetic hand of divine justice. When readers consider that most of the aspects of the diegetic world — and some of the aspects of the divine jurisprudence — are original inventions of Dante's, the impulse to read the plot as constitutive of a metatext intensifies and readings of overt descriptions of the organization of the underworld invite ever more interpretations as self-descriptions. For example, the punitive oversight assigned to Minos in *Inferno* 5 is an entirely original invention framed by the inquiries of other characters Mieke Bal would have described as focalizers, didactic vehicles through which the author directs the reader's attention, in this case, to the poetic logic behind the construction.⁸⁰ Readers who bear in mind this relationship between the diegetic and the metaliterary narratives can thus see in the first stanza of the poem the same simultaneous significance.

This chapter aims to uncover an additional nuance in one scene of interpretation of the sort that Franke identifies across the poem. As will be discussed in second half of this chapter, the metaliterary and diegetic narratives are simultaneously advanced in the forest of suicides in *Inferno* 13, where the poet and imperial advisor Pier delle Vigne describes the transformation from mortal flesh into a post-mortal tree while also seeming to describe the transformation from historical figure into literary character. Unlike the inscription on the gates of hell, which exerts diegetic and metaliterary significance because of its situation within the canto, the case of Pier in the forest functions simultaneously due to its situation within the poem: as the second appearance of the forest setting, which the first canto establishes as a stand-in for the poem itself, the forest of suicides reinforces a poetic philosophy steeped in Aristotelian metaphysics and Augustinian imagination.

⁸⁰ For Mieke Bal's notion of a focalizer see her *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed., tr. Christine Van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 142-160.

The arguments that follow propose that the first tercet of the *Commedia* condenses many of these cultural antecedents to create an exemplary setting for the inauguration of the poem's self-reflexive narrative. The *selva oscura* in the opening tercet of the poem invites two readings that simultaneously function in the metaliterary narrative as well: the *selva* itself suggests the poem's material state of beginning, while also recalling the dark or erotic subject matter that surrounded the historical Dante before his conversion to divine subjects. This invention on which this metaliterary reading is based digests two classical metaphors based on forest vocabulary that Dante's poem, in an act that characterizes the poetics behind many of the *Inferno*'s inventions, literalizes. The first metaphoric extension is Aristotle's, treated above, and will serve the *Commedia* as a reflection of its materialist state of material — all matter, no form. This Aristotelian installation also signals the beginning of the narrative of the formation of the poem, to which the second metaphor will add a markedly more negative association, linking this forest with spiritually compromising literature. This second metaphor, the forest of unlikeness, derives from Augustine's *Confessiones*, an autobiography that repeatedly imagines the impediments to his conversion as forests. While Augustine's influence on Dante is apparent to all who comment on the forest opening the *Inferno*, little mention is made of the textual referent of Augustine's constructions and their role in Dante's realization of a metaliterary sequence that would not only describe the poem's growth but moralize it as well.

The *Commedia* opens its diegetic and metaliterary narratives with its immortal first stanza:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

The diegetic narrative is self-evident: the readers have found themselves with the pilgrim in the middle of a dark forest. The metaliterary narrative this dissertation proposes is more subtle: the readers find themselves with the poet surrounded by the dark, erotic subject matter of his young career. By presenting the reader with a *selva* rather than a *bosco* or *foresta*, words used later in the poem to name a forest setting, this opening tercet casts the setting where the poet and readers first become aware of the poem as directionless and morally suspect. The “vita” shared by reader and poet begins with the “cammino”, their collaborative act of recollecting the poet’s earlier *Vita nova*. Referenced almost by name, the *Vita nova* and the readers’ assumed prior experience with it are compressed into the chronological reference to their relationship to—and understanding of—the poet before having even read these verses. The “diritta via” is the opportunity to express truths free of imagery, pretense or drama, a means unavailable to poets. Though the metaliterary readings of the first person plural and the shared temporality are ripe for analysis, the chief object of analysis here is the “selva” and the characterization it makes of the poem’s inaugural phase.

Within the metaliterary level, the *selva oscura* can convincingly represent the situation in which the poet finds himself, a literary world of incompleteness that leads to the spiritual world of sin proposed by the traditional reading. The shapeless *selva* can refer to the *Commedia* and the literary company from which, at only three verses, it has yet to distinguish itself. The position, abstraction and breadth of the initial tercet invite a consideration of that measure of poetic material as directly analogous to the first ingredient in Aristotle’s theory of matter, notions each conjured by *ὑλη* and its etymological descendants. Like the metaphysical *ὑλη*, the amount of poetic material in the very first stanza has yet to move towards a telos or demonstrate what genre, tone or even rhyme scheme it will adopt. Indeed, the metaliterary

reading of this verse sees it as not yet about anything but itself, an organism without purpose or form. When a self-reflexive metaliterary reading is applied to the *selva oscura* it also alerts readers to similar functionality in settings parallel to this, such as the forest atop Mount Purgatory and the vision of the divine volume of the final canto, each discussed below.

But the *selva oscura* can simultaneously — and just as compellingly — refer to the poetic context against which the nascent *Commedia* has yet to meaningfully distance itself, the world of the *Vita nova*. As that biography details, the poems composed by the younger Dante and his contemporaries anticipated a *guiderdone* — inherited from the *guizardon*, a fixture of the love lyric tradition practiced by the troubadours whom they so respected — which was often a sexual encounter from a recipient whose identity is disguised by an inventive *senhal*, another feature of Provençal lyric.⁸¹ With personal compensation investing the composition with deeper meaning for both the poet and the reader, the love poetry left behind by the young Dante and his friends is only half the story: indeed, it is literally half the story in the prosimetrical *Vita nova* the mid-career Dante composes around his own verse, realizing the novelistic potential of curated lyric sequences first ideated in Italian by Guittone of Arezzo whose canzoniere sought to provide the depth lacked by the poetry it contained, poetry that was altogether typical of the movement Dante imitates, outgrows and ultimately names in the *Purgatorio*.⁸² In the passage of the *Commedia* where Guittone's contemporary Bonagiunta of Lucca names the movement the “dolce stil novo”, Bonagiunta voices Dante's

⁸¹ On the *guizardon* in Provençal lyric see Gerald Bond, “Origins”, in Frank Ronald Powell Akehurst and Judith Davis, eds., *A Handbook of the Troubadours* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 237-254, 245. On the expectation of a reward or *guiderdone* for a poetic composition that characterizes Dante's pre-conversion poetics see Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the Divine Comedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 95. On the troubadours' use of *senhals* see Sarah Kay, “Desire and Subjectivity”, in Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, eds., *The Troubadours: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 212-227.

⁸² On the rudimentary macrotext fashioned by Guittone's collection of lyrics see Olivia Holmes, *Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 47-69.

critique of the failure of the poets between them, with the notable exception of Dante's beloved Guido Cavalcanti, to transcend earthly ambitions towards spiritual contemplation.⁸³ In the hindsight of the mature Dante, their poetic material depends on context and author functions for its depth and is in general spiritually incomplete. The critique of this poetry can be easily reflected in a metaliterary reading of the *selva oscura*, an encapsulation of its failings as rhetorical and metaphysical material in a purely abstract forest that unites all three valences of the classical Greek *ὕλη*.

The predominant argument of this chapter is precisely this, that the *selva oscura* stands for the still unformed poem and the environment in which Dante was active before his conversion, surrounded by the *dark matter* that he and his literary compatriots produced through worldly and often erotic poetry. Such a reading confirms and strengthens the traditional analysis of the setting of this canto, namely, that the forest represents a state of errancy. But it recommends an alternative route to this analogy that is not only justified by allusions to the content of Augustine's text, a basis many have found sufficient for the interpretation, but also a deeper meditation on Augustinian's original choice of the forest symbol that the *Inferno* expresses through the technique of literalization, the realization of poetic suggestion inherent words in figures of speech from which the entire *Inferno* profits. Thus, while it presents no novel conclusions in itself, the present reading nonetheless uncovers more robust evidence for a conclusion that otherwise rests heavily on assumption. The novelty of the present reading of the *selva oscura* instead lies in its capacity to introduce structures in the *Commedia* not often connected to this first verse, namely, the practice of literalization and the presence of the metaliterary narrative.

⁸³ On Dante's relationship to the preceding generations of Italian and Provençal poets see Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past", in Rachel Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14-34.

The traditional reading of the *selva oscura*, as reported by two trusted contemporary Dante references, interprets the setting above all as a symbol of the pilgrim's spiritual destitution. The reading synthesized in the *Enciclopedia dantesca* from the twentieth-century arguments of Benedetto Croce and Atillio Momigliano sees the forest of the first canto refuses to present itself as anything other than a pure "figura":

Nessun accenno [...], nel primo canto, a fronde, a rami, ad alberi, a luoghi determinati: bensì una serie di aggettivi che, anziché descrivere la s[elva], valgono a rappresentarne le suggestioni e gli effetti sull'animo del pellegrino smarrito, a drammatizzarne la situazione psicologica: oscura [...], selvaggia, aspra, forte, 'paurosa', amara, perigliosa, 'noiosa'.⁸⁴

With little description to go on, the majority of commentators read the mere presence of *selva* as an allegory for one or more aspects of Christian errancy, based, as Fiora Bassanese's entry in *the Dante Encyclopedia* details, on one of three physical aspects of the forest environment.⁸⁵ The situation of the forest on earth represents its vegetative worldliness, interpreted as godlessness in a Christian cosmology that distinguishes the world from the afterworld and hierarchizes matter below intellection. Its uniformity and lack of distinguishing characteristics contextualize the pilgrim's disorientation and, by extension, represent the poet's state of spiritual confusion. The darkness endemic to the woods adds the moral tinge of sin to both these extensions, together forming a space that efficiently conjures a spiritual and personal waylaid to mirror the pilgrim's literal loss. This reading proposes a highly functional allegory that readers in Dante's time would have recognized from similar uses in contemporaneous imaginative literature, most notably Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto*, a narrative poem where the accidental entry into a forest initiates a highly and explicitly

⁸⁴ See Ragni, "Selva", which in turn refers to Benedetto Croce, *La poesia di Dante*, 8th ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1956), and Atillio Momigliano, *Dante, Manzoni, Verga* (Messina: D'Anna, 1962).

⁸⁵ See Bassanese, "Dark Wood", 287.

symbolic journey.⁸⁶ But this traditional interpretation is not as delimiting as it may seem and it is possible to use the pedigree of its allegory — to paraphrase Daniel Javitch⁸⁷ — to rescue Dante from the allegorizers whose centuries of unproblematic handling of the symbolism in *Inferno* 1 has led to a strain of critical disappointment in an incipit apparently “lacking in true poetry”.⁸⁸

A more metaliterary reader like Jorge Luis Borges might have asked whether this traditional reading penalizes the *Commedia* for its position in history rather than appreciating the artistry of its reference.⁸⁹ Indeed, the appearance of symbolic forest settings in prominent works in Dante’s intellectual orbit, including his own *Convivio*,⁹⁰ indicates an additional functionality of the forest of the *Commedia* not applicable to the earlier texts, namely, that of self-aware referentiality. That the *Commedia* should open with a relatively tired and stretched metaphor signals to the reader that the poem is a narrative to be appreciated not only on its literal level — though the use of familiar tropes like the forest awakening certainly facilitates the digestion of this diegetic narrative — but also on its metaliterary level, where the citation of a device from obvious sources invites its readers to consider its status as a literary construction. An allegory so extended and so uninterested in embracing the spatiotemporal specificity that will define the poem to follow as an encyclopedia of its times can thus be more productively read not as allegory but instead as allegoresis, a representation of the original construction so faithful and naked that it assumes awareness of itself as an

⁸⁶ The protagonist of the *Tresor* crosses into a wood in verses 186-190; see the edition of Stefano Carrai, *Tesoretto* in Brunetto Latini, *Poesie* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), 3-155.

⁸⁷ See Javitch’s article on Ariosto, “Rescuing Ovid from the Allegorizers”, *Comparative Literature* 30.2 (1978): 97-107.

⁸⁸ See Bassanese, “Dark Wood”, 289, on the critical disappointment surrounding *Inferno* 1.

⁸⁹ Borges takes up the questions of citation and worth through the fictional discovery of a verbatim yet much improved recreation of the *Quixote* in his 1941 short story *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*; see *Ficciones* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1995), 41-54.

⁹⁰ See *Convivio* 4.24.12 in *Opere*, gen. ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 2011).

established symbolic and narrative structure. In this metaliterary context, the forest of *Inferno* 1 thus openly embraces the appearance of symbolic functionality, inducing readers to ask what about this perhaps cliché construction might have attracted the authors who made it such a recognizable trope. The citation in the very first stanza of a *selva oscura* often found at the beginning of journey narratives emphasizes an initial or preliminary quality to the forest that is perceived, not through any allegory based on physical attributes of the forest but instead through a literalization of the word used to describe it: *selva*, heir to a host of metaphysical associations from the classical Greek *ὄλη*.

The suggestion that the *selva oscura* reflects the pilgrim's waywardness through these metaphysical associations is present in the earliest surviving commentaries. Jacopo Alighieri's 1322 gloss proposes that the *selva* invites the reader to "figurativamente" "considera[re]" the pilgrim's "permane[nza]" in vegetative world:

s'avide ch'egli era in una oscura selva, dove la dritta via era smarrita. Per la quale, figurativamente, si considera la molta gente che nella oscurità dell'ignoranza permane, con la quale è impossibile di procedere per la via dell'umana felicità, chiamandola selva, a dimostrare che differenza non sia da loro sensibile e razional soggetto al vegetabile solo. Onde propriamente di cotal gente selva d'uomini si può dire come selva di vegetabili piante.⁹¹

The interpretation is based purely on materialist analogy: the vegetative content of the forest echoes the familiar hierarchy of vegetative desires beneath "razional" efforts, an echo that the reader is prompted to consider as a reflection of the pilgrim's composition at the start of the poem. Cristoforo Landino's commentary, published in Florence in 1481, the epicenter of neo-Platonic enthusiasm, makes a more refined connection between the pilgrim's spiritual condition and the forest by emphasizing the mediation of his world-bound body:

⁹¹ See Jacopo's commentary on *Inferno* 1.1-3, edited by Margherita Frankel at the Dante Dartmouth Project, dante.dartmouth.edu (2017), on the basis of Giulio Piccini's edition, *Chiose alla Cantica dell'Inferno di Dante Alighieri scritte da Jacopo Alighieri* (Florence: Bemporad, 1915).

Nè è senza cagione che lui ponessi la selva pel corpo, et consequentemente pel vitio, perchè et Platone et molti altri philosophi chiamano la materia corporea in greco ‘hyle’ et in latino ‘selva’, et chome l’animo ha ogni excellentia et felicità per la natura sua indivisibile incorporea et incorruptibile, chosi per l’opposito ha ogni calamità et ogni vitio per la selva, cioè pel corpo el quale è corruptibile. [...] Onde nascie che benchè l’anima nostra sia producta ad questa contemplatione, nientedimeno la selva gli fa smarrire la via, perchè la contagione del corpo gli toglie la cognitione [...].⁹²

The association here between *ῥλη* and the pilgrim rests less on semantic associations of vegetative and more extensive consideration of the *Commedia*’s representation of the inhabitation of space, suggesting that the forest is an extension of the pilgrim’s limited capacity to experience the world, that any space would be a forest to a protagonist in this condition.

Landino’s interpretation has had occasional fortune over the centuries but a 1966 article by John Freccero preached caution to readers who would leap from *selva* to the *ῥλη* of the pilgrim’s spiritual condition:

The gloss runs the risk, however, of leading to a serious misunderstanding. In the dark wood, we are not dealing with man’s hylomorphic composition, but rather with *sin*. Landino’s facile equation, ‘corpo, cioè vizio’ will not do for the ‘selva,’ for it obscures the fundamental point of Christianity’s quarrel with metaphysical dualism.⁹³

Freccero’s dismissal of a hylomorphic connection between the forest and the pilgrim’s soul is a convincing critique of the theological slight of hand needed to justify the forest as an allegory functional within the diegetic narrative. But rather than carry this critique to Freccero’s conclusion — that, namely, because Beatrice promises the pilgrim his time as a “silvano” (*Purg.* 32.100) will be short, then the “distinctive characteristic of the dark wood in

⁹² See Landino’s commentary on *Inferno* 1.1-3 edited by Francesca Ferrario and Robert Hollander at the Dante Dartmouth Project, dante.dartmouth.edu (2017), on the basis of the original *Comento di Christophoro Landino Fiorentino sopra la Comedia di Danthe Alighieri poeta Fiorentino* (Florence: Nicolò di Lorenzo della Magna, 1481).

⁹³ Freccero’s article, “Dante’s Prologue Scene”, *Dante Studies* 84 (1966): 1-25, is reprinted in *Poetics of Conversion*, 11, italics original.

Dante's poem is not that it is a *selva*, but rather that it is *oscura*⁹⁴ — readers interested how the *selva* might function within the metaliterary narrative can recuperate hylomorphic reference with an inquiry that is distinct from but adjacent to the interpretative tradition Freccero rejects: namely, might the vocabulary of prime Aristotelian material cast the forest of the prologue as a representation of the poem's beginning, not its protagonist's? Might the *selva oscura*, linked through etymology to the metaphysical substance *ἄλη*, also be linked to the rhetorical substance *ἄλη* in a symbolic construction that is not based on a leap, however theologically sound, from setting to character within the diegetic narrative, but instead profits from the simultaneous signification of the same etymologically charged word within the diegetic and metaliterary narrative? In short, what might it mean if the *selva* represented the vegetative state of the poem the poet is attempting to write and not the character of the pilgrim within it?

Such an extension has several implications for interpretations of the *Commedia* as a whole. As a meditation on the rich etymology of the word *selva*, such a reading uncovers an instance of literalization in a canto that faithfully introduces much of the poem's thematics but otherwise fails to introduce its characteristic poetic act, the marvelous realization of images and plot from the poetry already hidden in everyday expression. Secondly, it reveals a wrinkle of textuality in the forest imagery inherited from Augustine that recasts Dante's allusion as a caution against the moral danger specifically brought about by surrounding oneself with dark texts. The reference to the poem's own beginning that the initial *selva oscura* demonstrates within the metaliterary narrative can also alert readers to similarly metaliterary functionality in later passages of the *Commedia* that correspond to it, exposing a sequence of environmental images that depict the evolution and finalization of the poem as a

⁹⁴ Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, 11, italics original.

world within itself. The following paragraphs will articulate the reading along these lines and consider the potential implications it could introduce into an understanding of a poem born of extensive metaliterary reflection.

The metaliterary reading of the *selva oscura* sees the forest setting informed by the notions of poetic matter and unformed material in a literalization of two valences of the classical Greek *ὄλη* into the third valence of the forest. Such a reading thus uncovers the rhetorical technique animating much of the imagery in the *Inferno*⁹⁵ and, to a lesser extent, the later canticles.⁹⁶ The most famous of these inventions — and the most easily translatable — is the “bufera infernal” of *Inferno* 5 in which Paolo and Francesca of Rimini suffer the literalization of the figurative storm of passions that consumed them in life.⁹⁷ These characteristic punishments will be given a name by another focalizer, the character of the schismatic troubadour Bertran de Born, who is made to carry his severed head in correspondence with his division of a political family and who closes the canto by announcing, “Così s’osserva in me lo contrapasso”.⁹⁸ The *contrapasso* or countersuffering forms a cornerstone of the divine jurisprudence imagined by the *Commedia*, influenced in part by pre-Christian judicial texts that seemed to advocate a law of poetic retaliation — the talion or *lex talionis*, the exemplary ‘cutting off’ of a thief’s hand.⁹⁹ Though the talion is not

⁹⁵ On literalization in the *Inferno* see, among others, Freccero, *Poetics of Conversion*, 93-109.

⁹⁶ Dante’s mastery of literalization may be evident outside the *Commedia* as well. Robert Pogue Harrison argues that the “*Vita nuova* represents, among other things, Dante’s resolute attempt to *literalize* a poetic trope (the ideal woman) and to equate Beatrice with the prospect of transcendence itself”; see “Approaching the *Vita nuova*”, in Rachel Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35-45, 37, italics original.

⁹⁷ See *Inf.* 5.28-141.

⁹⁸ Bertran appears at the end of *Inferno* 28; his use of the term *contrapasso*, a hapax in the *Commedia*, is in 28.142. On the significance of Bertran as the exemplar of Dante’s vision of divine justice see Victoria Kirkham, “*Contrapasso*: The Long Wait to *Inferno* 28”, in Walter Stephens, Zygmunt Barański, Theodore Cachey and Teresa Kennedy, eds., *Tra Amici: Essays in Honor of Giuseppe Mazzotta*, supplemental issue to *MLN* 127.1 (2012), S1-S12.

⁹⁹ On Dante’s reception of the *lex talionis* see Anthony Cassell, *Dante’s Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 3-4.

an invention unique to the *Commedia*, the system of poetic punishments behind inventions like Francesca's or Bertran's is thoroughly embraced as the technique that can most closely reflect the triangular dynamics of realization at work in the *Commedia*. Just as Catholic orthodoxy in Dante's time saw the elements of the material world — most importantly, the historical figure of Jesus — as realizations of the figurations previously used to describe elements of the material world before the incarnation,¹⁰⁰ so too do the elements of the *Commedia* realize figurative descriptions of their existence in the mortal world. The punished souls act out the cliché, even invisible figurations that vernacular speech would have used to describe their past lives but the technique of literalization shapes other elements of the poem beyond its characters: the downward spiral of infernal topography, for example, literalizes the pattern of destructive behavior endemic to the environment and to Dante's concept of erotic love. As for the *selva oscura*, then, the literalization of the materialist and rhetorical figurations of *ύλη* in this opening line not only introduces the reader to the pervasive technique and its theological relevance but also articulates a self-definition that orients the reader within the moral timeline of Dante's career: the forest literalizes rhetorical matter, unformed, undistinguished from its vegetative company and lacking any end of moral rectitude. It is in fact the literalization of the position of the first tercet of the *Inferno* within the figurative trajectory of Dante's career: all promise, no fulfillment.

This metaliterary reading of the *selva oscura* thus sees the first tercet introduce its signature rhetorical technique, which reinforces the introductory function of the canto. Also introduced in this forest is Dante's chief Christian literary influence, the *Confessiones* of Augustine of Hippo, whose use of a forest to symbolize his spiritual dissolution was linked to

¹⁰⁰ On the figural cosmology of Christianity see Erich Auerbach, "Figura", in *Neue Dantestudien / Dante hakkında yeni arařtırmalar* (Istanbul: Ibrahim Horoz Basımevi, 1944), 27-43.

Inferno 1 by the very earliest commentaries.¹⁰¹ But most references to Dante’s allusion overlook the textual nuance in the original metaphors, with which Augustine depicted his adolescence in a forest of morally suspect literature. In the seventh book of Augustine’s account of his conversion to Christianity, the narrator describes his reaction to reading Platonic texts that offered valuable insights into the divine but failed to discuss the incarnation. His response to the lack he ascribes to these texts is to “redire ad memet ipsum”, into “intima mea”, from which he will then be guided by the light of eternal truth.¹⁰² Adjusting his eyes to this light, the speaker confesses to his god his “inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis”, and begins to inquire his way outwardly, from the godhead to the “cetera infra te”, the animal and vegetable world that everywhere bears the signature of its creator.¹⁰³

Everywhere, it seems, but in those Platonic texts and so he resolves to recognize the authority of apostolic metaphysics, reasoning that his holding the distinct Platonic arguments as equally valid would be like beholding the truth without venturing towards it:

et aliud est de silvestri cacumine videre patriam pacis et iter ad eam non invenire et frustra conari per invia circum obsidentibus et insidiantibus fugitivis desertoribus cum principe suo leone et dracone, et aliud tenere viam illuc ducentem cura caelestis imperatoris munitam, ubi non latrocinantur qui caelestem militiam deserverunt.¹⁰⁴

The forest imagery here is not the first occasion Augustine has had in his autobiography to represent his distance from the divine. Remembering his youth when he was habitually “ab [...] te aversus”, he confesses to his god his “exarsi [...] silvescere ausus sum variis et

¹⁰¹ The earliest interpretation of the *selva oscura* as a reflection of Augustine’s immoral youth is the second version of Pietro Alighieri’s commentary; see Pietro’s commentary on *Inferno* 1.1-3 edited by Silvana Pagano and Giovanna Puletti at the Dante Dartmouth Project, dante.dartmouth.edu (2017), on the basis of the manuscript *Petri Allegherii super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam Commentarium*, dated to 1344-1355.

¹⁰² See *Confessiones* 7.10.16, in the edition of Carolyn Hammond, *Confessions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁰³ *Confessiones* 7.10.16.

¹⁰⁴ *Confessiones* 7.21.27.

umbrosis amoribus”.¹⁰⁵ Once having been enlightened by the Christian scriptures, the speaker will imagine the mortal world of temptations around him as “hac tam immensa silva plena insidiarum et periculorum” and he will later hear a commandment from on high that will tell him, “vade, extirpa silvosa dumeta avaritiae”.¹⁰⁶ A similar metaphor is found in one of Augustine’s earlier works, the letter *De utilitate credenti* composed seven years before the *Confessiones*, where he situates his impulse to “reperi[re] veri” within an “inexplicabilis silva, cui demum inseri multum pigebat”.¹⁰⁷

The forest is clearly a recurrent symbol for Augustine but, while the space exercises several functions within Augustine’s *Confessiones*, the usage most related to Dante’s initial allusion is its extension of the forest as a *regio dissimilitudinis*. As with the prioritization of the darkness over the forest setting in allegorizing the *selva oscura*, the critical promotion of its Augustinian derivation has likewise tended to emphasize the dissimilarity of the metaphor at the expense of its geological specificity but what Augustine recognizes as dissimilar to the divinity is not in fact himself but instead the intellectual space he has come to inhabit, the complex of logically problematic Platonic translations in which he is immersed. The forest of Augustine’s *regio dissimilitudinis* thus represents textual significance, uniting the literal meaning and one figurative extension of the classical *ὄλη*, and the narrator’s experience of that space represents his reading and meditation on those texts. As Vito Fumagalli has argued, the experience of an outsider inhabiting the forest in the premodern world was often one of fear and confusion,¹⁰⁸ emotions implied by the representation of that environment

¹⁰⁵ *Confessiones* 2.1.1.

¹⁰⁶ See, respectively, *Confessiones* 10.35.56 and 13.19.24.

¹⁰⁷ See §20 in Joseph Zycha’s edition in *De utilitate credendi; De duabus animabus contra Fortunatum; Contra Adimantum; Contra epistolam fundamenti; Contra Faustum* (Prague: Tempsky, 1891), 1-48, which is volume 25 of the *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*. The letter is traditionally dated to 391-392, the *Confessiones* to 397-398.

¹⁰⁸ See *Città e campagna nell’Italia medievale* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1985), 31-37. See also *Quando il cielo*

which perfectly expresses the frightful confusion of textual authority presented to the young Augustine by the Platonic translations. The more he meditates on the forest of fraudulent texts around him, the more he is convinced of one thing: the absolute, essential difference between that space and another space he imagines would be appropriate for him to inhabit. For Robert Harrison, this dangerous otherness is the basis of the Western relationship with the forest¹⁰⁹ and, for Augustine in this passage of the *Confessiones* at least, the forest is given a similarly moralized charge of absolute differentiation, much like the materialist extension of *ὄλη* within the Christian metaphysical hierarchy.

But the forest of Augustine's *regio dissimilitudinis* also functions by incorporating the rhetorical extension of *ὄλη*, even in its other appearances. Perhaps drawing on similar metaphors in Origen's homilies and various passages of the Jewish and Christian Bibles,¹¹⁰ Augustine will use the forest to describe an arcane text, the difficulty of which he hopes can still lead him to divine truths. Having prayed to his god for "spatium meditationibus nostris in abdita legis tuae", the narrator expresses his conviction that he will find nourishment in those harsh writings just as "habent illae silvae cervos suos, recipientes se in eas et resumentes, ambulantes et pascentes, recumbentes et ruminantes".¹¹¹ So while critics who emphasize the Augustinian derivation of Dante's *selva oscura* do so responsibly — as Augustine's writings are doubtless the source of many of the *Commedia*'s structural features and inventions, even in *Inferno* 1 — the emphasis has usually served to disproportionately bolster the *oscura* component of Dante's invention, rather than its specificity as a *selva*. But

s'oscura. Modi di vita nel Medioevo (Bologna: Mulino, 1987), 23-26.

¹⁰⁹ On the reception of forests as manifestations of psychological and legal alterity see Harrison, *Forests*, 63.

¹¹⁰ See Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel 4:1* in the edition of Marcel Borret, *Homélie sur Ézéchiél* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989). Forest imagery that can arguably represent unorthodox belief systems also occurs in *Psalms* 103:20, *Isaiah* 10:17-34 and *Ezekiel* 20:46-47.

¹¹¹ *Confessiones* 11.2.3.

the forests Dante inherits from Augustine are significantly associated with reading, with interpretive aporia and with the philosophical challenges raised by the absence or visibility of divine markers in a given text, all connotations that just as effectively promote the idea that the forest opening the *Commedia* is yet another text of moral dubiousness: itself.

Another aspect of the *Commedia* that a self-reflexive interpretation of the *selva oscura* can introduce concerns the presence of the metaliterary narrative across the poem's settings. That is, if the forest in *Inferno* 1 can be productively read as a symbol for the poem itself, might similar readings of the settings related to the *selva oscura* yield further insight into the poem's presentation of itself? And if so, what might those readings produce when considered as a sequence? The remainder of this chapter explores the two other forests in the poem, the forest of suicides in *Inferno* 13 and the Earthly Paradise atop Mount Purgatory, and the last space imagined in the poem, the divine presence figured as a book. Following the *selva oscura*, the two settings of the later two canticles will form a metaliterary sequence that dramatizes the metaphysical development of the poem from a pre-formed material phase, evident in the *selva oscura*, to an exquisitely formed organism visible in the *divina foresta* at the height of humanity's expanse on earth and, lastly, to a wholly intellectual purity where expression and experience dominate with increasingly less reference to the material world. The forest of suicides will return to the first phase of this sequence and offer confirmation of the metaphysical valence of the morally undeveloped status of the poem through an additional focalizer, the talking tree containing the soul of the poet Pier della Vigna. His poignant description of the transformation from mortal to punished soul mirrors the transformation from historical person to literary character and signals that the same metaliterary import discernible in the settings can be found in related characters as well.

A Materialist Sequence

Following the forest of *Inferno* 1, discussed above, and the forest of suicides, discussed at the close of this chapter, is the third and final forest depicted in the *Commedia*, the Earthly Paradise atop Mount Purgatory that the pilgrim begins to traverse in *Purgatorio* 28. While the stable geography and triumphant mood of the Garden of Eden is almost exactly antithetical to the two infernal forests, the *divina foresta* has just as much potential for metaliterary significance as the earlier settings and, indeed, uses its obvious differences with the other forests to create a sequence that demonstrates the poem's self-aware evolution. The diegetic representation of the forest gives the impression of a rigorously ordered space, calm and quiet, the pinnacle of the *Purgatorio*'s systematic transition away from the chaos of the *Inferno*. The purgatorial forest is also the site of major transactions in the pilgrim's exchange of knowledge. Here he meets Matelda, who explains the topography of the garden while remaining herself an enduring enigma. He bathes in Lethe, the river of oblivion that — in an invention entirely Dante's — cleanses him of his mortal guilt (*Purg.* 31.94-98) and he also trades Virgilio with Beatrice as the beloved guide. The preoccupation with order, information and authority legible in this passage, coupled with the metaliterary functionality demonstrated by the two forest settings preceding it, thus invites a reading that sees the poem pass from a poetics of sameness, expressed throughout the first two canticles by literalizations and remarkably apt metaphors, into a poetics of likeness, articulated by simile and approximate images in the *Paradiso*. Mirroring the pilgrim's move from earth to ether within the diegetic narrative, the purgatorial forest of the metaliterary narrative reflects a move from the surface or 'outside' (*foris*, in Latin) of a poem composed of literalizations to a more interior poetics of suggestion and approximation. As the *Commedia* opens onto a realm

of pure abstraction from a realm of concreteness, the *divina foresta* marks the edge of a poetics of materiality that, in the medieval critical vocabulary, celebrates the *foris* or tenor of poetic description: it would be the last literalization in the poem, symbolizing with its etymology the metaphoric component that the poet has just surpassed, the meaning that can be found on the ‘outside’ of poetic language.

The notion that the pilgrim’s encounter with the *divina foresta* in the diegetic narrative may also have significance in the metaliterary narrative may have been first suggested by the presence of revered figures of knowledge in this forest.¹¹² It is in the *divina foresta* that Virgilio, the pilgrim’s guide to the enormity of mortal experience, is replaced by Beatrice, who can navigate the spaces and corresponding spiritual states privileged by their proximity to the divinity. This transition is negotiated by the pedagogue Matelda, who lectures Dante on the topography of the earthly paradise (*Purg.* 28.88-134), and will be reified in the river Lethe, through which the pilgrim is carried at the end of the episode. Each of these elements signal a change in the sort of knowledge being imparted to the pilgrim and, with him, the reader who is thereby alerted to the shift in the poem’s concerns. For example, Matelda’s extended description of the purgatorial landscape, one that is only minimally based on Christian precedent¹¹³ and that had only been legitimized as a penitential phase a few decades before the poem’s composition,¹¹⁴ is thus a chorography of a mostly original landscape that also draws attention to the marvel of the *Commedia*’s invention and, consequently, the *Commedia* itself. Once the setting can be appreciated as referring back to

¹¹² Another suggestion that the purgatorial forest features distinctly rhetorical symbolism comes from the only other mention of Earthly Paradise in Dante’s corpus, a passage from *De monarchia* (3:15.6-11) in which the setting reflects praiseworthy acts of human intellection, including the verbal arts of philosophy and poetry; see the edition in Marco Santagata’s *Opere* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011).

¹¹³ On the postmortal imagination inherited by the *Commedia* see Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica, 1989).

¹¹⁴ The concept of purgatory was first recognized by the Catholic Church in 1254 and refined in 1274; see Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 379-383.

the poem as a whole, it invites comparison with other settings that have already exhibited metaliterary referential, particularly when the invitation is aided by other similarities, such as the geological specificity of the forest.

Beyond their shared environmental specificity, comparisons between the *divina foresta* and the *selva oscura* are invited by syntactic patterns in the text as well. The phrase that defines the first setting “selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte” is almost perfectly echoed in the initial description of the purgatorial forest as a “divina foresta spessa e viva” (*Purg.* 28.2). The syntax highlights the nearly identical presentation, at similar milestones in the poem, of starkly different forest environments.¹¹⁵ If both forests independently exhibit metaliterary function — the *selva oscura* through its etymology and position within literary history and the *divina foresta* through its containment of major epistemological shifts — together, then, they form a sequence that can indicate the poem’s awareness of its own development. While the *selva oscura* ascribes an Aristotelian character of anonymous baseness to that phase of the poem, as has been discussed, the setting of the *divina foresta* is elevated, both literally — raised from the sea level of the diegetic planet the pilgrim inhabits — and figuratively, by being juxtaposed with the nameless forest of the opening canto, from which the famous Edenic setting, inherited from unmistakable textual precedent, has raised itself. The navigability famously prohibited to the pilgrim in the anteinfernal forest can be compared to the ease with which he passes through its purgatorial counterpart. Together these presentations form a sequence illustrating the metaphysical development of the poem: the *selva* refers to an unformed poem at the beginning of a phase of materialization and the

¹¹⁵ Sonority offers another noticeable contrast between the cacophony of the anteinfernal forest and “the effusively musical nature of the ‘divina foresta’”; see James Joseph Fiatarone’s dissertation, “From ‘selva oscura’ to ‘divina foresta’: Liturgical Song as Path to Paradise in Dante’s *Commedia*” (University of California, Berkeley, 1986), 514.

acquisition of order, logic and spiritual heritage that marks, a phase closed by the pilgrim's cleansed passage through the eerily calm and exhaustively described landscape and evident pursuit of the literary or spiritual ambitions that were missing at the opening of the poem.

Within the metaliterary narrative, then, the purgatorial *foresta* constitutes the completion of the poet's full-circle journey, from barely material forest to barely material forest, and yet also marks a closing boundary in a passage from a poetics of earthly referentiality to one of entirely conceptual representation. As with the *selva oscura*, this point in the metaliterary narrative is also affected by an act of etymological literalization: the Tuscan word *foresta* was imported directly from Latin, which called any hunting territory outlying a habitable domain *silva forestis*, 'the forest outside', eventually elided into the feminine noun *foresta*.¹¹⁶ While the nearly exclusive meaning of 'wooded area' makes *foresta* synonymous with other Tuscan words equally dominated by the same singular meaning, like *bosco*, a metaliterary reading of the *divina foresta* still sees the literalization of the etymological origin in the situation of the purgatorial forest within the sequence of the poem: the setting marks the poem's movement from *outside* a realm of material imagery, expressed above all by literalization, to an inside of the purely mental spaces of the *Paradiso*, describable only through approximation and simile. The rhetorical extension of *foris* familiar to readers in Dante's time reinforces the literalization in the *divina foresta*, namely, the Latin nomenclature for the tenor and vehicle of metaphoric constructions: *intus* and *foris*, respectively. The same terms distinguished the literal from the figurative senses of narrative description for theorists in Dante's time, based on Biblical precedent. The prophetic vision of a "liber [...] scriptus intus et foris" in *Ezekiel 2.9* inspired early modern exegetes to speak of

¹¹⁶ The etymology of *foresta* is contested but most sources accept the Latin 'foris' as the most probable root; see among others Olli Makkonen, "Forst-sanan alkuperä / Summary: The Origin of the Word Forst (Forest)", *Silva fennica* 8.1 (1974): 10-19, 19.

textual analysis in the same terms, as in the early fourteenth-century observation of Nicholas of Lyra that the “*liber scriptus intus et foris: foris quantum ad sensum letteralem; intus vero, quantum ad sensum mysticum sub littera latentem*”.¹¹⁷ As the pilgrim of the *Commedia* lifts off into a world of purely intellectual experience, the *intus* into which the purgatorial *foresta* will lead carries the poet from a highly referential to a world in which poetic language dwells only at the level of the *foris*, the surface, to a world unable to descend to the level of material description. The *divina foresta* thus offers the last literalization in a poetic movement away from an outside level defined yet limited by that technique — and others similarly grounded in material referentiality, like ekphrasis and extended concrete metaphors — and into a poetics of meditative suggestion.

The metaliterary sequence exhibited by the two forest settings depicts the substantiation of the *Commedia* itself, from an unformed directionless potential, entirely defined by its environment, to the total representation of human experience, at the very edge of the heavens. These forests bookend the pilgrim’s journey from disorientation to an awareness of the world so thorough that he must be cleansed of it before continuing onto the realm where he will learn of the divine organization of heaven. Though *Purgatorio* depicts the last forest — and, indeed, the last physical landscape — described in the *Commedia*, the sequence of metaliterary settings does not conclude on Mount Purgatory. Instead, the final vision of the divine volume completes the journey to a completely unified and wholly intellectual textual world from the starting point of the literalized *ῥλη* that represents the poem’s purely vegetal beginning. Distinct from the case of the two earlier forests, the metaliterary reading of *Paradiso* 33 need not be based on etymological subtleties emerging

¹¹⁷ See one of Nicholas of Lyra’s prologues to the writings of Walafrid Strabo, “In moralitates bibliorum”, in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patriologiae cursus completus [...] series secunda [...] ecclesiae latinae* (Paris: Garnier, 1879), 113:33B-36A, 33C.

from the diegetic representation, for the final spatial vision recorded by the diegetic narrative describes the presence of the divinity as a book.

The most famous image in the *Paradiso*, if not the poem as a whole, is the final divine manifestation of three interlocking circles witnessed by the pilgrim at the close of the final canto (*Par.* 33.115-120). Its fame is justified, as the vision fulfills the promise of Dante's entire literary career, foretold at the close of the *Vita nova*,¹¹⁸ to commit to representing divinity, first by reflecting on the organization of the world and, at last, through direct description. But immediately before he is privy to this impossibly immortal sight, the pilgrim sees the divine presence as a codex, bound by an equilibrium of unfolding and refolding, and describes his vision in lines as triumphant as those that follow them:

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna:
sustanze e accidenti e lor costume
quasi conflati insieme, per tal modo
che ciò ch'ì dico è un semplice lume (*Par.* 33.85-90).

The pilgrim's vision of the divinity as a book draws on various cosmological and literary traditions, chief among them the biblical and exegetical texts treated in the introductory section of this dissertation. Earlier passages of the *Commedia* ascribe a similar textuality to the realm of material experience or its creator, described as a "fabbro" (*Purg.* 10.99), the same epithet bestowed on the twelfth-century troubadour Arnaut Daniel, so respected by Dante that he is the only character to speak in a "parlar materno" besides Tuscan.¹¹⁹ In a separate scene, a *mise en abyme* midway through the last canticle, the pilgrim meets Dante's own great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida degli Elisei, who reads of the pilgrim's journey to and beyond that point in a "magno volume" (*Par.* 15.50), an image that inverts the wayward

¹¹⁸ See chapter 42 of the *Vita nova* in Guglielmo Gorni's edition in *Opere*, gen. ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 1:793-1063.

¹¹⁹ Arnaut is called the "miglior fabbro" in *Purg.* 26.117 and speaks in Provençal in verses 140-147.

arrival of punished souls pilgrim witnesses during his initial descent to hell, described as falling “foglie” (*Inf.* 3.112) — leaves, conjuring both trees and codices. The final vision of the highest sphere of the universe as a codex thus resonates with many other elisions between writing and the nature of the material world, both in the *Commedia* and in the various Christian cosmographies, detailed in the following chapter of this dissertation, that imagined the universe as a Book of Nature.

Beyond its intellectual inheritance, the *Paradiso*'s penultimate invention is also remarkable for its function within the metaliterary narrative. While on the diegetic plane of the *Commedia* the pilgrim beholds the space occupied by the divine presence as a book, the same image functions as metaliterature by depicting the book, the *Commedia* itself, as a divinely unified space, as Freccero proposes:

[j]ust as the inscription on the gates of Hell is written in *terza rima*, as though there were no distinction between what [the pilgrim] saw and what we read, so the vision of God as a book corresponds to the closure of the text we hold in our hands, despite the protestations of its fragility and dispersion.¹²⁰

Just a few verses from completion, the *Commedia* has indeed become a universe unto itself. By this point the diegetic narrative has offered, in Eric Auerbach's words, an “enzyklopädisches” cross-section of the human, animal and vegetal diversity of Dante's known world,¹²¹ all organized around a coherent physical and meteorological logic and animated by a prime mover who is triumphantly included in these final verses. The notion that Dante's *Commedia* constitutes its own world or multitude of worlds has inspired so much scholarly research — most directly, in the form of the rich online platform

¹²⁰ John Freccero, “Allegory and Autobiography”, in Rachel Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 161-180, 176, italics original.

¹²¹ Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, 3rd ed. (Bern: Francke, 1964), 181.

*Danteworlds*¹²² — that such a conclusion may seem commonplace to today's critics. But contemporary familiarity with literary microcosms need not obscure the grandeur of the poet's final realization that his work has fully matured and, indeed, persists even briefly as a unified spiritual space, not yet *squadernato*, ripped into pages by a world of scribes, commentators and readers. In this metaliterary interpretation, the pilgrim's vision of the divine is analogous to the narrator's vision of textual completion, an equally transcendent experience that can exist only in this ethereal world of pure ideation.

The position of a metaliterary spatial invention at a significant point at the close of the *Commedia* invites comparison with the other self-reflexive settings inscribed at crucial milestones in the poem, the *selva oscura* and the *divina foresta*. The pilgrim's vision of the divine book may seem unrelated to the forest environments studied earlier — it is barely an environment at all — but the three spaces treated do indeed form a coherent sequence when considered for their metaliterary function. If the divine volume that the pilgrim approaches in the *Paradiso* represents the *Commedia* itself, then the characterization of the poem this representation offers must be centered around those attributes highlighted by the description of the immaterial book: integrity, timelessness and, most importantly, divinity. Such a characterization seems makes logical and emotional sense as a reference to a literary creation that only the poet can see as a complete, active world even if this purely intellectual vision, which transcends the work's mere words on paper, is only available to him. This identification is quite a remove from the metaliterary references legible in the *selva oscura*, a hypertemporal space, one almost suddenly entered and one still awaiting literary formation and divine inspiration. Between these two poles is the *divina foresta*, which can reveal through a metaliterary reading a boundary zone within the *Commedia* where the tensions

¹²² *Danteworlds* was conceived by Guy Raffa and can be accessed at danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu (2002-2007).

between chaos and order, timelessness and contemporaneity, divine and mortal are all suspended. The three settings thus constitute a sequence demonstrating the evolution of the poem from a prematerial state to one of immortal intellection and dramatizing the hylomorphic hierarchy perpetuated by Aristotelian metaphysics and depicted as a physical truth just a few cantos earlier.¹²³ The final vision of the codex is a triumph for the literary and spiritual ambitions of the poet not only because it satisfies objectives within the Dantesque corpus but also because it demonstrates through the subtle metaliterary reflections etched into significant passages that the poem's apparent awareness of its own development confirms the philosophical platforms espoused by that very poem. It is a triumph, then, not only for what it depicts but also for the depth which with that depiction is embedded in the poetry itself, from its program of settings to its individual word choices.

The initial, central and final settings of this metaliterary sequence complete a narrative about completing a narrative and together depict the birth of the Christian poem from a chaotic, pre-material state to the point of encompassing all mortal experience. By drawing on connotations latent in the etymology of the environmental terms used to describe the forest — *selva* and *foresta* — the *Commedia* conjures a materialist trajectory that comes to pass through and outside the boundaries of material representation. Seen together, the two forests form a comprehensive identification of the early material of the *Commedia* with the forest environment, an idea as old as the use of the Greek word *ὄλη* to refer to the wooden stuff of conversation, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. The poet's final vision of his poem as a divine whole returns the idea of a book as a cosmos, a world, an idea that the twentieth-century vocabulary of artistic worldmaking can articulate from the intricate

¹²³ See the description of material formation in *Paradiso* wherein the first phase or “pura potenza tenne la parte ima” (*Par.* 29.34).

geology and metaphysics of Dante's poem. But an additional aspect of the Dantesque corpus finds resonance in the literary world envisioned by the divine volume at the close of the *Commedia*, namely, the contemporaneity that informed the lyrics of the young Dante and his compatriots in the *dolce stil novo*.

One of the elements common to the poetry of the *stil novo* is the poet's marked embrace of contemporaneous reality. While still concerned with the thematics of unrequited love and the consequent quasi-medical attention to lovesickness that the first generations of Italian poets had inherited from their Provençal models, the *stilnovisti* were innovative in applying these cliché lyric formulae to more sincere worldly ambitions.¹²⁴ The more cerebral of these poets, like Cavalcanti, adopted the scheme of the inaccessible lover to express transcendental meditations about the human condition, but poets just as gifted, Guido Guinizelli for one, applied their talents to real-world amorous pursuits. These ambitions are reflected in the inclusion of specific spatiotemporal details and the rehabilitation of certain communicative aspects of Provençal poetry in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Italian literature, like the reemergence of the *tenso* genre in which poets exchange epistolary verses or the use of anonymizing *senhalz* to construct stylizations of real people. The poetry the younger Dante composed in this literary company similarly reflects the functionality its author envisioned it exercising in his actual life: lyrics such as the sonnet beginning "Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io" integrate proper names, holidays and specific places to express their communicative function more vividly,¹²⁵ a function also evident throughout the *Vita nova*, Dante's self-edited poetic autobiography. The prose commentary in the *Vita nova*

¹²⁴ For detail on the reception of the troubadours by *stilnovisti* see Luciano Rossi, "Stilnovo", in Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola, eds., *Antologia della poesia italiana* (Turin: Einaudi/Gallimard, 1997-1999), 1:370-378, 373-377.

¹²⁵ See sonnet 8 in *Rime*, ed. Claudio Giunta, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 1:3-744.

deconstructs the poetry, already replete with *senhalz* and accurate biographical details, in order to expose the author's explicit ambitions to alter his reputation, maintain a sham relationship with a woman he imagines as a "schermo de la veritate"¹²⁶ and, ultimately, win the favor of his real beloved through these poems. Given that the *Vita nova* concludes with the narrator's conversion to a purely spiritual poetics, the relationship of the *Vita nova* to the *Commedia* typically emphasized by critics is that of a generically oriented preface, since the earlier prosimetrum contains a vision of the divine poetics that the epic will exemplify. But as the clearest representative of the stilnovist application of poetic forms to personal concerns, the *Vita nova* also introduces readers to Dante's characteristic practice of using the real world as the basis for his poetic world, a practice that will triumph in the encyclopedic mirror of early modern Italy that is the *Commedia*.

When the final vision of the divine volume returns the idea of the poem as a unified, living space — a world — it thus satisfies both the metaliterary sequence within the work and the literary ambitions within Dante's career more generally. To claim that the *Commedia* illustrates the artistic activity Nelson Goodman would describe as "worldmaking" some six centuries later, again, may not seem a significant interpretive accomplishment, given the attention that the poem lavishes on the topographical, biological and meteorological features of the afterlife, many of which are Dante's original inventions. The intense considerations of the physics of the poetic world, together with the work's metaliterary referentiality and awareness of its literary progression, are some of the aspects Frank Lima honors when renaming the *Commedia* "Straight Out of You" in his beat tribute cited at the opening of this chapter. But if a claim about worldmaking were instead to come from the text itself, it would constitute a rather significant admission about the poetic career that culminates in such a

¹²⁶ The *donna-schermo* first appears in chapter 5 of the *Vita nova*.

triumphant vision. From his younger lyrics with their explicit social and sexual ambitions to the mature *Commedia*, Dante's poetry is always a poetry of the world and this perennial link between his poetic production and the world around him reinforces the achievement of the metaliterary sequence completed at the close of the *Paradiso*.

The sequence of doubly charged settings proposed here is just one feature of the metaliterary narrative that, throughout the *Commedia*, alternates with the diegetic narrative in vying for the reader's attention. But beyond these are further episodes that also express their dual, simultaneous significance through forest settings. The remainder of this chapter will examine the forest of suicides and squanderers in *Inferno* 13 along the same lines as the settings studied in this section. If the forest can represent the texture of the poem itself, as suggested by the reading of the two forests bookending the pilgrim's journey through the material world, then the only forest to be represented between these poles, that of the suicides, can also be investigated for its simultaneous significance in the metaliterary narrative. Such a reading, in fact, proves very productive when the object of study is less concerned with the collective forest, as it has been above, than with its individual trees. One tree in particular demands investigation along metaliterary lines, not only because it speaks and not only because it purports to contain the soul of an Italian poet, but because its treatment of the transformation from mortal to vegetal vessel seems to reflect, with echoes of the hylomorphic hierarchy already traced out by the *selva oscura* and *divina foresta*, the tree's consciousness of the transformation from historical person to fictional character.

Planted in Literary History

The metaliterary narrative of the *Commedia* is not only populated by the first-person figure of the poet who recounts the difficulty of his task but also by characters from the diegetic

narrative whose presentations exert simultaneous diegetic and metaliterary significance. Perhaps the most famous example of such literary self-awareness in a character other than the narrator is Bertran de Born's admission that in his representation "si osserva [...] lo contrapasso", which, as was discussed above, alerts readers not only to the characteristic element of divine jurisprudence as the *Commedia* imagines it but also to the signature poetic operation of the poem itself, the literalized metaphors still known by the term Bertran uses, *contrappassi*. So while Bertran physically exemplifies the technique, holding his own severed head as penance for the political bodies he helped sever, he also names it in the significant position of the last verse of his canto, suggesting his own awareness of the trope being observed within him and not just his punishment. In the only other forest besides the two studied above, the depiction of Pier della Vigna in *Inferno* 13 offers another character who seems to refer to his position within a work of literature not by making reference to a specific literary technique, as Bertran does, but rather by emphasizing his transformation from human into tree and also — in light of the associations between forests and poetic composition established in the infernal forest preceding it — into the base level of literary material.

The diegetic narrative of *Inferno* 13 contains many echoes of the forest in *Inferno* 1, especially given that the hylomorphic hierarchy presented at the opening of the poem strongly resonates in the later setting. To readers familiar with the materialist theories described above, the forest setting of *Inferno* 13 immediately embodies the most notable aspects of the materialist *ὄλη* from the poem's opening and was recognized as such by the earliest commentators. Jacopo Alighieri's 1322 commentary describes the "allegoria" of *Inferno* 13:

si come naturalmente si vede l'umana generazione tre animati si possiede cioè vegetabile, razionale e sensitiva, delle quali la vegetabile, cioè, quella che in vita crescendo permane, alla sua fine giammai non consente. Ma perchè nel corpo umano la rationabile e la sensitiva a sua morte talora consente, però in piante silvestre cotal qualità di gente, figurativamente, si forma, siccome creature in isola vegetabile rimase, essendoci dell'altre due sè stesse private.¹²⁷

Determined by the haphazard fall of the souls into that area of hell, the vegetative growth in the forest of suicides is randomly distributed,¹²⁸ as is the motion of Platonic pre-material entities that Dante would have known in translation as *selva*. The collocation of suicides with squanderers in this sector of the underworld may also depend on this interrupted trajectory of potential, be it vital or financial, prevented from reaching its material actualization. The logic behind Pier's *contrappasso* — his soul encased in a tree from which his earthly body will forever hang, even after the Last Judgement, when Christian doctrine stipulates the reunion of bodies with souls¹²⁹ — centers on the hierarchy of the Christianized materialist morality surrounding suicide, viewed as an undue prioritization of the vegetative concerns over the body's intellectual responsibility to the divine. As Pier in life had paid excessive concern to his vegetative needs but insufficient devotion to the divine, his condition in death literalizes that consideration by polarizing the vegetal and intellectual halves of the human being.

A metaliterary reading of Pier's transformation profits from recasting Jacopo's materialist "allegoria" in light of the associations between vegetal matter and subject matter established in *Inferno* 1 to propose the character as a reflection of the archetypal character he has seen himself become. While the arboreal prison for the suicidal soul imprisoned in a tree

¹²⁷ See Jacopo, *Chiose*, s.v. "*Inf.* 13.1-3".

¹²⁸ Pier details the suicidal soul's journey from Minos, the snake-tailed warden at the entrance to hell, in *Inf.* 13.94-99: "Quando si parte l'anima feroce / dal corpo ond' ella stessa s'è disvelta, / Minòs la manda a la settima foce. / Cade in la selva, e non l'è parte scelta; / ma là dove fortuna la balestra, / quivi germoglia come gran di spelta."

¹²⁹ In *Inf.* 13.103-108, their eternal punishment is also described by the fallen Pier in an act of ventriloquism that would have insulated Dante from charges of heresy: "Come l'altre verrem per nostre spoglie, / ma non però ch'alcuna sen rivesta, / ché non è giusto aver ciò ch'om si toglie. / Qui le strascineremo, e per la mesta / selva saranno i nostri corpi appesi, / ciascuno al prun de l'ombra sua molesta".

clearly combines two valences of *selva*, several aspects of the presentation link this animated tree with literary commentary. Not only is the *contrappasso* applied to a prominent poet from the earliest generation of Italian literature, one intimately connected to the emperor whose cultural ambitions launched Italian literary production as Dante would have understood it, but this poet's monologue also recalls Provençal prose *vidas*, the reductive biographies of troubadours that accompanied their poetry in the chansonniers compiled about a century after their flourishing and that were often constructed off putatively biographical indices within the poems themselves.¹³⁰ Most poignantly, the admission at the opening of Pier's monologue — “uomini fummo e or siam fatti sterpi” — suggests that he has been made into pure narrative material as well. His self-aware transformation from human to character, from dynamic, complex personality to an altogether archetypal construction, coalesces around the notion of a literary legacy implied both by the allusions to *vidas* and also by the choice of such a significant figure in the literary development of the Italian language and thus produces an example of the base end of hierarchical literary materialism. These literary references, coupled with the Vergilian pedigree of the trope of the talking tree, together distinguish Pier della Vigna as a metacharacter, another of the people and places in this poem with dual significance on both the diegetic and metaliterary narratives.

One inroad to a metaliterary examination of the tree purporting to house the soul of a fellow Italian poet is to relate the materialist hierarchy associated with the forest setting with that poet's position within literary history. Petrus de Vineia or de Vineis, known alternately by the Tuscan names Pier or Pietro della Vigna or delle Vigne, was chancellor and poet at the

¹³⁰ On the *vidas* and other paratexts in Provençal lyric collections see Elizabeth Poe, “The *Vidas* and *Razos*”, in Frank Ronald Powell Akehurst and Judith Davis, eds., *A Handbook of the Troubadours* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 185-197. Though only two *vidas* are signed, Uc claims in his explication of Savaric de Mauleon to have authored other paratexts in that collection; see Poe, “*Vidas* and *Razos*”, 188.

traveling court of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, the Italian-born heir to the Hohenstaufen dynasty who established a mobile court in various sites in Sicily and Southern Italy in the first half of the thirteenth century.¹³¹ An emperor not too proud to call himself “unum ex Apulia”, a patron of several educational institutes and a writer himself,¹³² Frederick appears to literary historians as an Italophile determined to establish a vernacular literature that could rival the Romance poetic traditions that were flourishing in Provence and Northern France.¹³³ While the literary output under his time in fact drew on Greek, Hebrew, German, Latin and French sources as well as popular oral literature in Italian dialects,¹³⁴ the most sustained approach to literature was a “sistema” of collecting and imitating Provençal love lyric, at times through verbatim translation,¹³⁵ that would eventually be termed the *scuola siciliana*, as Dante himself predicted, writing in his linguistic treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* that “quicquid nostri predecessores vulgariter protulerunt, sicilianum voc[ar]etur: quod quidem retinemus et nos, nec posteris nostri permutare valebunt”.¹³⁶

¹³¹ On the life and career of Pier della Vigna see Hans Martin Schaller, “Pier della Vigna”, tr. Maria Paola Arena, in Ortensio Zecchino, gen. ed., *Federico II. Enciclopedia fridericiana* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005), available at treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Federiciana.

¹³² Federico’s description of himself comes from a 1238 letter; see Hubert Houben and Oronzo Limone, “Prefazione”, in Hubert Houben and Oronzo Limone, eds., *Federico II: “puer Apuliae”. Storia, arte, cultura. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di studio in occasione dell’VIII Centenario della nascita di Federico II (Lucera, 29 marzo – 2 aprile 1995)* (Galatina: Mario Congedo, 2001), 7. In the 1240s, Federico authored a treatise on falconry, *De arte venandi cum avibus*; on Frederick’s career see Thomas Curtis Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: Immutator Mundi* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

¹³³ For the hypothesis that Federico directly commissioned the development of a literary language see Frede Jensen, “Introduction”, in Frede Jensen, tr. and ed., *The Poetry of the Sicilian School* (New York: Garland, 1986), xv-lxvii, xv.

¹³⁴ On the multilingual production under Federico see Peter Dronke, “La poesia”, in Pierre Toubert and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, eds., *Federico II e le scienze* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1994), 43-66.

¹³⁵ Roberto Antonelli describes the movement as a “sistema” aiming to “raccolgere e riproporre in Italia le esperienze poetiche più avanzate disponibili in Europa”; see “La corte «italiana» di Federico II e la letteratura europea”, in Enrico Menestò, ed., *Federico II e le nuove culture. Atti del XXXI Convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 9-12 ottobre 1994* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1995), 319-345, 341, italics original. The most famous pseudotranslation is *Madonna, dir vo voglio* by Giacomo of Lentini, inspired by the canso *A vos, midontç, voill retrair’en cantan* of Folquet de Marselha.

¹³⁶ *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.12.4; see Mirko Tavoni’s edition in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 1:1065-1547.

Various theories for the sheer proportion of such imitations persist today — including the limited variety provided by the few manuscript chansonniers known to have been in Southern Italy,¹³⁷ likely compiled with a specific collector’s tastes in mind, and the motivations of the Tuscan scribes who bequeathed these compositions to literary historians — but, given the preoccupation with Italian vernacular tardiness legible in Dante’s linguistic treatise *De vulgari eloquentia*,¹³⁸ the author of the later *Commedia* likely imagined Frederician poetry as a deliberately mediocre effort. Not only is it strategic for an emperor of a politically divided territory to sponsor education and arts, especially those that foster a sense of local pride, but the specific dynamic of the troubadours’ love songs chosen for imitation — a dynamic of unrequited love that promotes subservience to the husband of the inaccessible beloved and, thus, the prioritization of political duty over personal impulses — perpetuate a culture of obedience that can further insulate a ruler. This characterization can inform a reading of Pier’s punishment as synecdoche for Dante’s literary judgement of pre-Tuscan poetry, given the intimacy and imperial devotion attributed to Pier in the *Inferno*. Pier’s suicide, not confirmed by any documents and thus possibly Dante’s invention,¹³⁹ suits this characterization of Frederician poetry, for by appearing to satisfy no other aims than that of perpetuating the most superficial aspect of literature, the sonority of its language, this body of literature failed to give itself immortality through any real inspiration.

¹³⁷ The chansonniers most likely to have circulated in Bologna and Southern Italy have been given the abbreviations *T*, *f*, and *N*. On *T* see Giuseppina Brunetti, “Sul canzoniere provenzale T (Parigi, Bibl. Nat. F. fr. 15211)”, *Cultura neolatina* 50 (1990): 45-73, 45-46; see also Stefano Asperti, “Le chansonnier provençal T et l’École Poétique sicilienne”, *Revue des langues romanes* 98 (1994): 49-77. On *f* see Roberto Antonelli, “Traduzione-tradizione. La tradizione manoscritta provenzale e la Scuola siciliana”, in Maria José de Lancastre, Silvano Peloso and Ugo Serani, eds., *E vós, tágides minhas. Miscellanea in onore di Luciana Stegagno Picchio* (Viareggio: Baroni, 1999), 49-61, 49n1. On *N* see Stephen Nichols, “‘Art’ and ‘Nature’: Looking for (Medieval) Principles of Order in Occitan Chansonnier N (Morgan 819)”, in Stephen Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, eds., *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 83-122.

¹³⁸ Such belatedness is treated in book 10 of *De vulgari eloquentia*.

¹³⁹ Pier was taken as political prisoner and blinded in March 1249 but no documents describe his death; see Schaller, “Pier della Vigna”.

The characterization of Pier della Vigna and, with him, the Frederician poets as literary suicides overly devoted to the emperor coheres with a vision of Italian literary history also found in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, namely, a vision defined by a perceived protonationalist cultural tardiness and calcified in its valorization of inspired lyric poetry as the supreme measure of the viability of a Romance vernacular. But what other aspects might be added to this characterization of these poets, or at least of Pier, by the tree that purports to house his soul? The pattern of literalizations throughout the *Inferno* may have initially inspired Dante to transform a poet known as Peter of the Vineyard into a vine for his own body but here, as throughout the *Commedia*, the arboreal setting can also exert a deeper literary significance, especially in light of the position of *silva* in the materialist hierarchies referenced in *Inferno* 1. The idea of material without application aptly describes the processes of accumulation that occurred under Frederick: the accumulation of both linguistic material — by Italianizing words like *speranza* and *donna* from the Provençal *speransa* and *domna* rather than directly from the Latin *spes* and *domina*¹⁴⁰ — as well as metrical material, notably in the elaboration of the standalone sonnet from the Provençal *cobla* by Giacomo of Lentini.¹⁴¹

This rough poetic material would go on to find fruitful applications by the Tuscan poets at the turn of the century — and likely even earlier, in the late thirteenth century, by a second generation of more innovative poets centered around Guido delle Colonne in Messina, whom Dante regards well in *De vulgari eloquentia*.¹⁴² Along the way this poetic material would acquire first animality, with the first macronarrative arrangements of Tuscan

¹⁴⁰ For the etymology of *speranza* and *donna* see the relevant entries in Pianigiani, *Vocabolario etimologico*.

¹⁴¹ On the invention of Giacomo of Lentini see William Kennedy, "European Beginnings and Transmissions: Dante, Petrarch and the Sonnet Sequence", in Anthony Cousins and Peter Howarth, *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84-104, 84-86.

¹⁴² On the position of Guido delle Colonne in literary history see Contini, *Poeti del Duecento*, 1.1:95-96.

sonnets composed by Guittone of Arezzo,¹⁴³ and later rationality, with the philosophically and stylistically ambitious poems of the younger Dante and Cavalcanti. As a representative of a generation of Frederician poets exclusively concerned with the vegetable generation of words and templates but aligned along no moral or spiritual path, the character of Pier and his “bosco / che da neun sentiero era segnato” (*Inf.* 13.2-3) can be seen to constitute the *ῥλῆ* of the Italian poetic tradition — no more, no less, and this literalization of rhetorical *ῥλῆ* into a talking tree repeats the technique used in the *selva oscura* and the *divina foresta* of realizing literary commentary. Such a reading may have informed Sandro Botticelli’s rendering of this canto (**figure 1**) in his series of illustrations of the *Commedia*, left incomplete by 1480, in which the artist’s characteristically ordered composition gives way to a *horror vacui* expressed by his explosion of the pictorial plane with foliage.¹⁴⁴ The suicidal forest and the early Italian poetry referenced by it are disproportionately, even obsessively, concerned with the accumulation of vegetative material and can offer no path to other poets, as in the *selva oscura* in which pilgrim and poet alike could not yet find direction.

¹⁴³ On Guittone’s canzoniere, arguably the earliest poetic collection to form a macronarrative, see Olivia Holmes, *Assembling the Lyric Self*, 15-16 and 47-69.

¹⁴⁴ For Botticelli’s illustrations see Friedrich Lippmann, ed., *Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante’s Divina Commedia: Reproduced Facsimilies in the Royal Museum Berlin and in the Vatican Library* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1896); page 95 reproduces the illustration to *Inferno* 13 now kept at the Vatican Library, MS Reg.lat.1896, folio 102r.

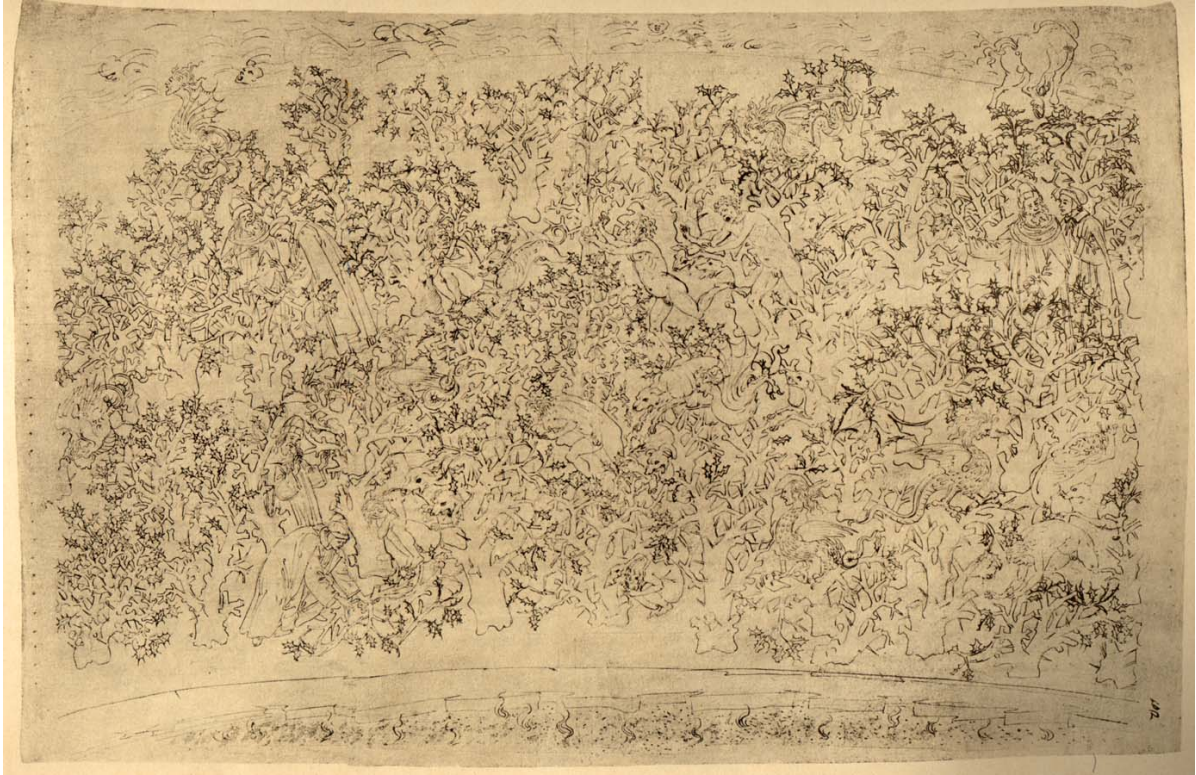


Figure 1: Botticelli's illustration of *Inferno* 13

The talking tree in the diegetic narrative can thus be convincingly interpreted as a literary commentary that alerts readers to potential significance within the metaliterary narrative. Once the presentation of a soul within a wooden vehicle is recognized for its compositional implications, the same association between forest wood and poetic material can inform a reading of Pier della Vigna as a metacharacter, a character depicted with an apparent awareness of its permanence in a literary environment. The awareness is clearest in an early tercet of his monologue, his lament that “Uomini fummo e or siam fatti sterpi”. Pier and the souls he represents do not merely undergo a transformation but are instead “made” (“fatti”) to do so. Within the diegetic narrative, the agent behind such a making is the Christian divinity but when read within the metaliterary narrative the verse the maker can instead refer to the inventor of his *contrappasso*, the author of the *Commedia*, thus making

the character appear aware of his literary detention. Beyond this hint at his authored status and beyond the links between poetic composition and wood established in *Inferno* 1, the metaliterary reading of Pier is reinforced by the exemplarity imposed on him and, indeed, all the characters who are called forth to explain their position in the *Inferno*. Pier's explanation of the punishments of suicidal souls, predicated by the interchangeable use of the first person singular, first person plural and third person singular,¹⁴⁵ makes him a representative for the sin of suicide within the system of divine justice as depicted within the poem. His role as a representative for suicide is enhanced by the larger context of the canto in which Virgilio encourages the pilgrim to use the tree to learn about that region of the underworld, an episode that mirrors the way Vergil historically led Dante to learn about the construction of a literary underworld through the character of the talking shrub in his *Aeneid*.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, the character of Pier functions as an informative example within both the diegetic and metaliterary narrative. In the diegetic narrative, as has been discussed, Virgilio urges the pilgrim to open the tree up so that he would know more about the design of the character from the inside, thereby pointing the poet to the usefulness of such a device transplanted in a Christian context. As the pilgrim learns the biology of the suicidal trees, the poet in the metaliterary narrative silently demonstrates the intricacy of his invention, the original threads with which various inherited tropes — the classical myth of Minos, details of Christian eschatology, Aristotelian hylomorphism, the character from the *Aeneid* — are synthesized into one self-proclaimed “cosa incredibile” (*Inf.* 13.50). The incredibility that Pier attributes to the body synthesized from preexisting sources mirrors the incredibility of

¹⁴⁵ The first uses of each person appear in *Inf.* 13.35-96: “Perché mi scerpi? / non hai tu spirito di pietade alcuno? / Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi / [...] / Quando si parte l'anima feroce / dal corpo ond' ella stessa s'è disvelta, / Minòs la manda a la settima foce”.

¹⁴⁶ Polydorus, the slain son of Priam and Hecuba, is transformed into a talking myrtle shrub in book 3 of the *Aeneid*.

the autobiography he recites, also based on the purely literary precedent of his own poetry. Like the glib *vidas* that typically prefaced the works of individual troubadours in chansonniers, most of which were likely written about a century later by the grammarian Uc de Saint Circ,¹⁴⁷ Pier's biography is derived from clues within and around the poetry and is fabricated when necessary. Representing not only his placement in the underworld and its relation to the divinely ordained cosmos of the *Commedia*, Pier has also been made to represent his own poetry, in a selective and highly artificial manner that readers today may recognize as fulfilling an author function that confirms a dominant reading of the poetry.¹⁴⁸ The reductive fixity that accompanies the transition from the historical figure of Pier della Vigna to the character in the *Commedia*, just as fictive as the person Italian literary historiography imagines wrote Pier's poetry, is what makes his self-aware plaint that "or siam fatti sterpi" function as a metaliterary gesture, one that is, like many others featured in this dissertation, expressed through the forest setting. Pier becomes a metacharacter and, fittingly, his words are produced by a horrid mixture of air and bloody sap, reminding readers of a manuscript written with dark plant extracts that this metacharacter speaks in ink.



What can be said about Dante's woods as a whole, then, across its three incarnations? The *Commedia* uses the forest to represent the fields of literature in which Dante finds himself. The appearances of the forest environment number three, not surprisingly for a poem that reflects the trinitarian unity of the Christian divinity on both the macroscopical level, with its three canticles, and the microscopic level, with its tercets and complex *terza rima*. The entry

¹⁴⁷ On the career of Uc de Saint Circ see William Burgwinkle, *Love for Sale: Materialist Readings of the Troubadour Razo Corpus* (New York: Garland, 1997), 75-113.

¹⁴⁸ The notion of a "fonction auteur" was proposed by Michel Foucault in a 1969 lecture entitled "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?", reprinted in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. Daniel Defert, François Ewald and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 1:789-821.

in the *Enciclopedia dantesca* entry suggests that the triptych of forests in the *Commedia* forms a programmatic vision of the forest.¹⁴⁹ This study adds to the program seen here by arguing the three forests of the *Commedia* represent the literary environments in which Dante the poet finds himself. The forests mark a narrative of material completion in much the same way that trinities throughout the *Commedia* serve to mark time and progress: the forest of the *Inferno* references the past, the anteinfernal *selva oscura* represents the present, the purgatorial *foresta* points to the future. Together the three forests form a comprehensive identification of the text with the forest environment, an idea as old as the use of the Greek word *ὕλη* to refer to a rhetorical substance, the wooden stuff of conversation. With his literalizations, though, Dante introduces these traditions into the literature of the Italian vernacular. Drawing on timeless etymological associations and ancient literary traditions, the forest with which he opens his *Commedia* will nonetheless inaugurate a tradition in Italian literature, the trope of proposing the forest as reference to the work itself.

¹⁴⁹ See Ragni, "Selva", 1:138.

Chapter 2: Space and Systems in the *Decameron*

“A man walks into a bar...”
American joke setup¹⁵⁰



This chapter asks the same question of Boccaccio’s narratives as it does those of Dante, Ariosto and Tasso: namely, how might the forest settings in this text reflect a metaliterary awareness? Unlike the narrative poems studied in this dissertation, each delivered by a single albeit complex narrator, Boccaccio’s framed collection of short stories instead presents several vantage points within its narrative, compounding any approach to identifying metaliterary expression. For the *Decameron* is ultimately and explicitly a story about storytelling, a tale in which ten friends tell each other a hundred *novelle*, tales that themselves often comment on the nature of discourse, be it narrative or conversational. Beyond this *mise en abyme* of narrative planes there are also authorial paratexts — a title, a preface, a conclusion — that comment on the frame tale from yet another perspective, which readers from Boccaccio’s time onward have had to distinguish from the scribe or editor of the particular volume they were reading.¹⁵¹

With this abundance of literary awareness, metaliterary aspects of the environments within the narrative can be more easily identified by inverting the guiding question: rather than evaluating the diegetic environments for their metaliterary potential, as with Dante’s *selva oscura*, this chapter will begin by investigating overt descriptions of storytelling and narrative practice in the *Decameron* for their environmental potential, their capacity to form

¹⁵⁰ The bar joke template may be traced to “The Consummately Dry Martini”, a column by Charles Burbank Palmer published in the *New York Times* on 6 April 1952, SM41; see Scott McNeely, ed., *The Ultimate Book of Jokes: The Essential Collection of More Than 1,500 Jokes* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2012), 6.

¹⁵¹ For the history of the text of the *Decameron* and its built-in paratexts see Vittore Branca, “Introduzione”, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron. Edizione critica secondo l’autografo Hamiltoniano*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1976), v-cxxxv.

or at least stage a literary world. Descriptions of the sequence of stories by different micronarrators return a specifically topographical image of the *Decameron* as a garden, a forest, a field, a meadow. These characterizations of the text signal an overarching attention to the spatiality of narrative that is visible in the collection's preoccupation with brevity, congruity and proximity to the time and place of Boccaccio's readers.

Once the narrative can be appreciated for as its overt spatiality, one basis for understanding narrative expression as the construction of a world, this perspective can then invite inquiries concerning the generation and perpetuation of narrative action by interacting with poetic spaces, both formal boundaries and diegetic settings. A precursor to the more obviously self-generating literary system of the *Orlando furioso* studied in the following chapter, the *Decameron* exploits the narrative possibilities afforded by plot, character and temporal rhythms endemic to certain environments, even if only in a rudimentary fashion. The forest of several tale can be read as exerting impulses that at least in part let the story to tell itself, as the old saying goes. The tale of Nastagio degli Onesti is one such story especially when that particular forest is recognized as a Dantesque homage and a miniature of many of Boccaccio's literary ambitions.

Literary Worlds

While the forests of the *Commedia* discussed in the previous chapter and those of the *Gerusalemme liberata* discussed in the last offer compelling evidence that the etymological associations between woods, words and metaphysical creation can help articulate a metaliterary narrative, the same works also offer a clear vision of literary worldmaking, a notion that will have even more bearing on the metaliterary interpretations of the forests of Boccaccio's *Decameron* here and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* in the following chapter. The

concept of artistic worlds may sound impertinently contemporary in the wake of Nelson Goodman's groundbreaking essays on art criticism in the mid 1970s, collected in the 1978 volume *Ways of Worldmaking*.¹⁵² But Goodman's fundamental premise — namely, that the work of art exhibits the characteristics of a world, a system of imported elements reorganized into new relationships — had surely occurred to early modern thinkers as well. Tasso himself makes the analogy that heroic narrative poem is “come un picciolo mondo”, in his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* composed as early as 1562:

[...] peroché, sì come in questo mirabile magisterio di Dio, che mondo si chiama, e 'l cielo si vede sparso o distinto di tanta varietà di stelle, e, discendendo poi giù di mano in mano, l'aria e 'l mare pieni d'uccelli e di pesci, e la terra albergatrice di tanti animali così feroci come mansueti, nella quale e ruscelli e fonti e laghi e prati e campagne e selve e monti si trovano, e qui frutti e fiori, là ghiacci e nevi, qui abitazioni e culture, là solitudini e orrori; con tutto ciò uno è il mondo che tante e sì diverse cose nel suo grembo rinchiude, una la forma e l'essenza sua, uno il nodo dal quale sono le sue parti con discordie concordia insieme congiunte e collegate; e non mancando nulla in lui, nulla però vi è di soverchio o di non necessario; così parimente giudico, che da eccellente poeta (il quale non per altro divino è detto se non perché, al supremo Artefice nelle sue operazioni assomigliandosi, della sua divinità viene a partecipare) un poema formar si possa nel quale, quasi in un picciolo mondo, qui si leggano ordinanze d'esserciti, qui battaglie terrestri e navali, qui espugnazioni di città, scaramucce e duelli, qui giostre, qui descrizioni di fame e di sete, qui tempeste, qui incendi, qui prodigii; là si trovino concilii celesti e infernali, là si veggiano sedizioni, là discordie, là errori, là venture, là incanti, là opere di crudeltà, di audacia, di cortesia, di generosità; là avvenimenti d'amore o felici, or infelici, or lieti, or compassionevoli; ma che nondimeno uno sia il poema che tanta varietà di materie contenga, una la forma e la favola sua, e che tutte queste cose siano di maniera composte che l'una l'altra riguardi, l'una a l'altra corrisponda, l'una dall'altra o necessariamente o verisimilmente dependa, sì che una sola parte o tolta via o mutata di sito, il tutto ruini.¹⁵³

¹⁵² For Goodman's legacy in literary criticism see David Davies, “Works, Texts, and Contexts: Goodman on the Literary Artwork”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21.3 (1991): 331-345. For recent literary theory based on worldmaking includes David Herman, “Narrative Ways of Worldmaking”, in Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer, eds., *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 71-87.

¹⁵³ See *Arte poetica* 2, in Poma, ed., 36. For the dating of the composition of the *Arte poetica* see Luigi Poma, “Nota filologica”, in Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*, ed. Luigi Poma (Bari: Laterza, 1964), 262-328, 262-268. Tasso's comparison between worlds and the narrative poem is even broader in the third book of his revised version of this treatise, the *Discorsi del poema eroico*, published in 1594: “peroché, sì come in questo mirabile magisterio di Dio, che mondo si chiama, e 'l cielo si vede sparso o distinto di tanta varietà di stelle, e, discendendo poi giù di regione in regione, l'aria e 'l mare pieni di ucelli e di pesci, e la terra albergatrice di tanti animali così feroci come mansueti, nella quale e ruscelli e fonti e laghi e prati e campagne e selve e monti sogliamo rimirare, e qui frutti e fiori, là ghiacci e nevi, qui abitazioni e culture, là

Tasso's view of interrelated system of environments, rhythms and events constitutes perhaps the clearest early modern articulation of literary worldmaking and reflects his considerable meditation on literary theory, particularly Aristotle's *Poetics*, composed in the fourth century BCE but only repopularized to Italian readers in the decades preceding the composition of Tasso's *Arte poetica*.¹⁵⁴ Though Aristotle does not employ the metaphor of a world in his discussion of poetry, he does imagine the elements of the poetic work as having their own intrinsic properties that influence other elements within the artistic "whole" ("εἶμῃ").¹⁵⁵

If the logic behind Tasso's metaphor may have been derived from an Aristotlean text then quite in fashion, his vocabulary may well have been inspired by an equally popular text in his time, *La fabrica del mondo*, Francesco Alunno's handbook for professional writers. Printed first in 1548 and at least three more times before 1560, the earliest proposed date of the composition of Tasso's *Arte poetica* — totaling seventeen printings by 1622¹⁵⁶ —

solitudine e orrori; con tutto ciò uno è il mondo che tante e sì diverse cose nel suo grembo rinchiude, una la forma e l'essenza sua, uno il nodo dal quale sono le sue parti con discordie concordia insieme congiunte e collegate; e non mancando nulla in lui, nulla però vi è che non serva alla necessità o all'ornamento; così parimente giudico che da eccellente poeta (il quale non per altro è detto divino se non perché, al supremo Artefice nelle sue operazioni assomigliandosi, della sua divinità viene a partecipare) un poema formar si possa nel quale, quasi in un picciolo mondo, qui si leggano ordinanze di esserciti, qui battaglie terrestri e navali, qui espugnazioni di città, scaramucce e duelli, qui giostre, qui descrizioni di fame e di sete, qui tempeste, qui incendii, qui prodigii; là si trovino concilii celesti e infernali, là si veggiano sedizioni, là discordie, là errori, là venture, là incanti, là opere di crudeltà, di audacia, di cortesia, di generosità, là avvenimenti d'amore or felici, or infelici, or lieti, or compassionevoli; ma che nondimeno uno sia il poema che tanta varietà di materie contegna, una la forma e l'anima sua, e che tutte queste cose sieno di maniera composte che l'una l'altra riguardi, l'una all'altra corrisponda, l'una dall'altra o necessariamente o verisimilmente dependa, sì che una sola parte o tolta via, o mutata di sito, il tutto si distrugga"; see Poma, ed., 139-140.

¹⁵⁴ On the repopularization of Aristotle in the generations preceding Tasso's literary flourishing see Daniel Javitch, "The Assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Sixteenth-Century Italy", in Hugh Barr Nisbet and Claude Julien Rawson, gen. eds., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3:53-65.

¹⁵⁵ In chapter 6 of the *Poetics* Aristotle refers to "[t]ragedy as a whole" ("ἔστιν ἡ τραγῳδία") as having exactly six components; see Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. and ed. Stephen Halliwell, in Jeffrey Henderson, ed., *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 27-141, 1450a. One example of the concept of the inherent properties of these dramatic components is found in the discussion of plot length in chapter 24: "the genre's own nature teaches poets to choose what is apt for it" (1460a: "αὐτῆ ἡ φύσις διδάσκει τὸ ἄρμόττον αὐτῆ αἰρεῖσθαι"). The agency of one element over another is demonstrated in the same chapter: "a highly brilliant diction, on the other hand, obscures character and thought" (1460b: "ἀποκρύπτει γὰρ πάλιν ἢ λίαν λαμπρὰ λέξις τὰ τε ἦθη καὶ τὰς διανοίας").

¹⁵⁶ Printings of Alunno's *Mondo* appeared in 1548, 1556, 1557, 1560, 1562, 1568, 1570, 1575, 1581, 1584,

Alunno's dictionary of poetic citations would no doubt have passed into the hands of the young Tasso, steeped in the literary culture of Italy's preeminent courts, if not for the volume's utility then for its eye-catching title, which even its author admits is "forse alquanto arrogante".¹⁵⁷ In Alunno's introduction, the image of the "mondo" communicates merely encyclopedism instead of any overt interdependency:

[...] alcuni nel primo incontro di questa opera, senza haverne forse letto di quella piu oltre, offesi dalla grandezza del titolo, hanno detto, che non è alcuno si ardito, che si possa dar vanto di fare alcuna fabbrica del mondo si perfetta, come quella, che fece il gran Padre, & creatore di tutte le cose. Alla quali per mia difensione rispondendo, pregherò ciascuno, che non voglia così tosto giudicare del Titolo, se prima non ha bene considerata tutta la continenza dell'opera. Percio che io ad imitatione di molti Greci, & Latini altersi, c'hanno intitolato le loro opere con nome di Cornucopia, di Casa, o di Favo di mele, di Pandette, di Biblioteca, o di altri nomi somiglianti, ho così nominata l'opera mia per essere la Fabbrica di Cosmo, nella quale non intendo di formar Stelle, Pianeti, ne Elementi, o diversità di paesi, & d'animali, ma si come nella fabbrica d'Iddio si trovano tutte le cose create, così nell'opera mia si leggono tutti i modi, & le varie proprietà di parlar di quelle, secondo il leggiadro stile delli tre facondissimi autori, che sempre ci sono sicura scorta, & chiaro lume per condurci alla volgare eloquenza.¹⁵⁸

Indeed, in his dedicatory letter to the Great Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici, Alunno reveals the sycophantic basis for a title that he could have easily derived from those "altri nomi somiglianti":

Se si considera l[a] materia, di che io tratta, laquale è tutta della lingua Thoscana, saria stato un'offendere la lingua istessa, alla quale intendo giovare, se l'havessi levata dal seno di vostra Sig[noria] Eccellentiss[ima]. Se s'ha rispetto al titolo, & al nome di esse opera, che è la Fabrica del Mondo, per contenere la regolata architettura delle voci volgari, colle quali si possono isprimere tutte le cose create nel mondo, a qual nome di Prence poteva io piu attamente offerirla, che al gran Cosmo? il cui nome in lingua Greca non suona altro, che Mondo, & così è segno evidente, che sia quello, che ciascuno prova, cioè il piu saggio, il piu giusto, il piu magnanimo, et liberale Prencipe, c'hoggi viva in terra, & finalmente ornamento, & splendore dell['] universo. Talche giungendo il titolo dell'opera mia con l'

1588, 1591, 1593, 1600, 1612, 1618 and 1622, mostly from Venetian publishers.

¹⁵⁷ See Francesco Alunno, "Alli saggi, et giudiciosi lettori", in Francesco Alunno, ed., *La fabrica del mondo [...] nella quale si contengono tutte le voci di Dante, del Petrarca, del Boccaccio, & d'altri buoni autori, con la dichiarazione di quelle, & con le sue interpretationi Latine, con le quali si ponno scrivendo isprimere tutti i concetti dell'huomo di qualunque cosa creata* (Venice: Bascarini, 1548), †4r-†5v, †4r.

¹⁵⁸ Alunno, "Alli saggi, et giudiciosi lettori", †5v.

Illustrissimo nome vostro, tanto importa a dire Fabrica di Cosmo, quando
Fabrica del Mondo.¹⁵⁹

Tasso's vision of the poem as a "picciolo mondo" may thus have been in part inspired by an opportunist grammarian anticipating Medici expansion.

Having fully elapsed after the print explosion of the early sixteenth century, the case of Tasso's worldmaking is relatively easy to contextualize. But how might earlier poets, particularly Boccaccio and Ariosto, have intuited the idea that a narrative text was a world unto itself, before any possible priming from Alunno's dictionary or the newly translated *Poetics* of Aristotle? And even without explicit textual antecedents, could not the works of Dante, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Tasso — each endowed with geographical, biological and meteorological depth, exemplified by their forest settings — still have been imagined as literary worlds, even by their own authors? Close readings of the forests and other settings of these masterpieces reveal that not only is such a metaphor possible but also that such a metaphor may be fundamental to the works' presentation of their own literary identity and ambitions.

As can be seen in the writings of Alunno and Tasso, the metaphoric association between a world and a literary work can be predicated on various affinities between the two concepts, from encyclopedism to interconnectedness, and the interpretations of the forests in the four narratives featured in this dissertation are similarly founded on varying affinities between words and worlds, which include their metaphysical composition, their order and the arbitrariness of their meaning. Although a comprehensive search for all the classical texts that may have treated these affinities and, therefore, may have inspired early modern Italian

¹⁵⁹ See Francesco Alunno, "Al magnanimo, et illustriss. Cosimo de Medici Gran Duca di Firenze", in Francesco Alunno, ed., *La fabrica del mondo [...] nella quale si contengono tutte le voci di Dante, del Petrarca, del Boccaccio, & d'altri buoni autori, con la dichiarazione di quelle, & con le sue interpretationi Latine, con le quali si ponno scrivendo isprimere tutti i concetti dell'huomo di qualunque cosa creata* (Venice: Bascarini, 1548), †2r-†3v, †3r-†3v.

writers would be impractically kaleidoscopic, the chief of the numerous directions of inquiry required for such a study can nonetheless be outlined here.

One affinity between the landscape and poetic language is its status as a creation by an external agent. Inspiration may have derived from such links at the very foundation of Abrahamic thought. *Genesis* 1 describes the creation of the world through a series of divine speech acts. Once formed, the world is marked with indelible traces of its authorship: “caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opera manuum eius adnuntiat firmamentum / dies diei eructat verbum et nox nocti indicat scientiam” (*Psalms* 18.2-3). Christian doctrine dramatically solidified the textual connection between the material world and divine will, not only reiterating the invisible signatures linking created things to their author — “invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas ut sint inexcusabile” (*Romans* 1.20) but also describing Christ as the “Verbum caro factum” (*John* 1.14), the incarnation of the original Verbum that “erat apud Deum et Deus erat” (*John* 1.1). The Christian incarnation of word into flesh is itself mediated through angelic and mortal speech acts, including Gabriel’s annunciation and the Virgin’s acceptance (*Luke* 1.26-38) and the angelic address to Joseph (*Matthew* 1.18-21).

Proportionality is another affinity between the literary work and the concept of a world that readers can derive from Christian doctrine. Early modern Christians would have understood the environment into which the Verbum was made flesh to be itself a perfectly disposed crucible, arranged according to an appropriate number, weight and measure. So dictates the *Book of Wisdom*, erroneously attributed to Solomon by some premodern scholars and still today of dispute canonicity: an apostrophe to the divinity in *Wisdom* 11.21, “omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti”, inspired numerological experimentation well into

the early modern era.¹⁶⁰ The notion of a quantitatively balanced universe occurs in all major traditions of classical Greek cosmology as well — the Platonic vision of a transcendent proportional harmony perceptible in formal expressions, the Aristotelian deduction of cooperative physical axioms, and the Pythagoreans’ more extreme ambition to trace the algorithm of the universe — but although classical Greek philosophy marshals a vast repertoire of metaphors to describe the composition of the universe, imagery related to writing or speaking is not prevalent.¹⁶¹

These Biblical associations would be reiterated by the early Christian exegetes who grounded Christian thought in the era of the four poets studied here. The fourth-century bishop of Hippo Augustine, for example, reads the heavens in Genesis as a parchment: “caelum enim plicabitur ut liber”.¹⁶² The textual character of the world would be further amplified by twelfth-century French natural philosophers, whose image of a Book of Nature would become a permanent fixture in early modern European cosmological thought. The Book of Nature is depicted most thoroughly in Alain of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*, possibly composed between 1160 and 1165.¹⁶³ Alain’s prosimeter has the personification of Natura describe her domain as governed by “grammaticae leges”, subject to a panorama of errors when defied by a human “sophista falsigraphus”.¹⁶⁴ In their search to explain the material world through Christian doctrine — a search exemplified by Anselm of Canterbury just a few

¹⁶⁰ On *Wisdom* and numerology see Faith Wallis, “‘Number Mystique’ in Early Medieval Computus Texts”, in Teun Koetsier and Luc Bergmans, eds., *Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), 179-199, 182-183.

¹⁶¹ On proportion in the major cosmologies of ancient Greece see Pedersen, *Book of Nature*, 6-11.

¹⁶² See *Confessiones* 13.15.16.

¹⁶³ For the dating of the *Planctu* see James Sheridan, “Introduction”, in Alain of Lille, *The Plaint of Nature*, tr. and ed. James Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 1-64, 31-35.

¹⁶⁴ See Alain of Lille, *De planctu Naturae*, in *Literary Works*, ed. Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 21-218, verse 1:20 and paragraph 8.8, respectively. For Alain’s further use of grammatical metaphors see also chapters 1 and 8-10 in Wetherbee’s edition.

decades prior, around 1078, as “Fides quarens intellectum”¹⁶⁵ — Alain’s contemporaries applied the same metaphor of a book to human history. In a treatise long considered to be an appendix to the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint Victor, composed in the late 1120s, early modern readers read that

Universus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei [...]. Quemadmodum autem si illiteratus quis apertum librum videat, figuras aspicit, litteras non cognoscit.¹⁶⁶

Bernardus Sylvesteris echoes this authored construction of the world, writing in the *Cosmographia* he composes by 1147 that his divinity “Scribit enim celum stellis, totumque figurat / Quod de fatali lege venire potest”.¹⁶⁷

Further affinities between the literary work and the notion of a world can be observed by considering the direct links between poetry and actual ecologies. In a strictly material sense, the geology of many diverse ecologies has facilitated literary communication by providing potential materials for transmission, like tree bark or stones. Indeed, the word that Latin writers would use most often to refer to a bound volume of writing, *liber*, literally

¹⁶⁵ See the “Prooemium” to his *Proslogion*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. Franz von Sales Schmitt (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946-1961), 1:89-122. For the dating of the *Proslogion* see Gillian Rosemary Evans, “Anselm’s Life, Works, and Immediate Influence”, in Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5-31, 12.

¹⁶⁶ The passage derives from the seventh and final book included in early modern manuscripts and the first printed edition of Hugh of Saint Victor of around 1473, though no longer included in modern editions, such as Charles Henry Buttimer’s edition, *Didascalicon de studio legendi: A Critical Text* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1939). But as late as 1880, Jacques-Paul Migne included it in the *Patrologia latina* as the “liber septimus” to the *Didascalicon*, writing that “Hunc in Didascalico non comperi, sed quasi illius appendicem”; see Hugh of Saint Victor, *Eruditionis didascalicae libri septem*, in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patriologiae cursus completus [...] series secunda [...] latinae* (Paris: Garnier, 1880), 176:739-838, 176:811. The citation above follows Migne’s edition; see 176:814. For the dating of the *Didascalicon* see Jerome Taylor, “Introduction”, in Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalion of Hugh of St. Victor*, ed. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 3-39, 158n1. For the history of the seventh book see David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 311n1. For a survey of scribal metaphors in Hugh’s thought see Gillian Evans, “Hugh of St Victor on History and the Meaning of Things”, *Studia Monastica* 25.2 (1983): 223-234.

¹⁶⁷ See Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. Peter Dronke (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 3.33-34. For the dating of the *Cosmographia* see Theodore Silverstein, “The Fabulous Cosmogony of Bernardus Silvestris”, *Modern Philology* 46.2 (1948): 92-116, 115.

refers to the pliable layer of fibers exposed by peeling (λέπω, in Greek) off the bark.¹⁶⁸ In Germanic languages, too, folk etymology links the concepts of books and beech trees,¹⁶⁹ an association reflected by centuries of writing on plant-based products throughout the globe, from the Egyptian papyrus to Hellenic reed scrolls to Chinese rice paper.¹⁷⁰ Even after the dawn of parchment and pulped cloth paper, products dependent on the cultivation of animals and plants rather than plants alone, the rhetoric used to describe the format of professionally produced book still retains a nominal connection to plants: the individual ‘folios’ (from *folium*, the Latin word for ‘leaf’) were rebound into a ‘codex’ (from the Latin *caudex*, which originally referred to tree trunks).¹⁷¹

Beyond material support, certain environments like the forest can also provide poets with substantive inspiration through their rivers, winds and, perhaps most famously, songbirds. The appearance of the nightingale as a foil for the poet can be traced back to an anonymous Late Latin poem, the *Pervigilium Veneris*, unknown to early modern scholars before Erasmus.¹⁷² The four poets studied here would instead have understood the earliest major self-referential exploitation of the nightingale by the twelfth-century troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn,¹⁷³ who would inspire variations from countless vernacular lyricists in

¹⁶⁸ See Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “liber”.

¹⁶⁹ For the etymological links between the words *book* and *beech*, see the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in *OED Online*, oed.com (2016), s.v. ‘book’.

¹⁷⁰ On ancient writing systems based on plants see David Diringer, *The Book before Printing: Ancient, Medieval, and Oriental* (New York: Dover, 1982), 13-52. See also Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, tr. David Gerard, eds. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: Verso, 1984), 29-44.

¹⁷¹ See Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “caudex”.

¹⁷² On the nightingale in the *Pervigilium* see Wendy Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature* (New York: Lang, 1985), 17-20. For its dating see Alan Cameron, “The *Pervigilium Veneris*”, in Salvatore Costanza, ed., *La poesia tardoantica: tra retorica, teologia e politica. Atti del V corso della Scuola Superiore di Archeologia e Civiltà Medievali presso il Centro di Cultura Scientifica “E. Majorana”*, Erice (Trapani), 6-12 dicembre 1981 (Messina: Centro di Studi Umanistici, 1984), 209-234, 214-229.

¹⁷³ See in particular Bernart’s poems 22, 24, 26 and 27, in Frederick Goldin, tr. and ed., *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères: An Anthology and a History* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1973), 128-155.

the centuries to follow. Beyond directly furnishing material and inspiration, the forest environment in particular offered urban poets the simple opportunity to think more clearly, as Petrarca writes: “Le città son nemiche, amici i boschi, / a’ miei pensier” (*RVF* 237).¹⁷⁴

Further affinities between the literary work and physical environments can also be found by meditating on the very nature of poetic expression. The task of organizing a comprehensible message in a meaningful form demands the conception an almost ecological spatiality and sequentiality. This internal impulse for order was visible to the Hellenistic poet Simmias of Rhodes, who crafted a poem about crafting poetry in the form of that ultimate self-enclosed ecosystem and an ubiquitous metaphor for the geological world: the *Egg*, composed in the third century BCE.¹⁷⁵ This metapoem adopts a highly self-referential presentation, the verses of its increasingly longer couplets rearranged to form an egg, possibly to be inscribed on an oval-shaped rock (**figure 2**).¹⁷⁶ An early example of concrete poetry, forms that remind the reader of the often overlooked forces of spatial arrangement and of non-linear poetic communication, Simmias’s poetic system balances contrary directionalities much like a physical ecosystem: the optical sequence works against the lexical, the poet’s desire to enclose meaning opposes the reader’s need to decode it and the concave of the potential engraving is pit against the convex surface of the stone. The process

¹⁷⁴ Various passages of the second and third books of Petrarca’s *Secretum*, composed and revised between 1347 and 1353, also describe the need to create productive environments mentally if not also geographically. For the dating of the *Secretum* see Enrico Fenzi, “Introduzione”, in Francesco Petrarca, *Secretum*, tr. and ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milan: Mursia, 1992), 5-77, 5-20.

¹⁷⁵ See Simmias, “Simias: The Egg”, in Neil Hopkinson, tr. and ed., *Theocritus. Moschus. Bion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 568-569. For the dating see Jan Kwapisz, “Introduction”, in Jan Kwapisz, ed., *The Greek Figure Poems* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 1-56, 22. Greek mythology understood the physical universe and the original diety to have hatched from an egg; for the European legacy of this idea see Rudolf Simek, *Erd und Kosmos im Mittelalter: das Weltbild vor Kolumbus* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 32-35.

¹⁷⁶ On the intended presentation and interpretation of the *Egg* see Glenn Todd, “Notes on the Selections”, in Glenn Todd, ed., *Shaped Poetry: A Suite of 30 Typographic Prints Chronicling This Literary Form from 300BC to the Present*, with notes by Andrew Hoyem (San Francisco: Arion, 1981), 2:17-35, 2:17. The image represented here, folio 191r from Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana MS Cod. Laur. Ashburnh. 1174, is reprinted in Dick Higgins, ed., *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 24.

of poetic composition the poem conveys involves reproduction and destruction, all expressed in biological metaphors that mirror the calcification and deconstruction of the poem's form. The subtle complexity of Simmias's egg would thus have provided resounding confirmation to any early modern European poet familiar with the Greek anthology who had occasion to wonder whether the task of poetic expression was anything like worldmaking and, moreover, would have offered an electrifying example of the possibilities of such a meditation.



Figure 2: Simmias's Egg in a fifteenth-century manuscript

The task of poetic expression, for narrative and dramatic poets specifically, also implies diegesis, the representation of objects and events that must necessarily exist in a setting, however sparsely that space is described. In some cases, though, the setting has garnered such extensive elaboration that it becomes inseparable from the literary ambitions of the work or even of an entire genre. Bucolic or pastoral dramatic poetry is an early example of a genre of wholly defined by the specificity of its setting and the verisimilitude of the events and conversations depicted therein. Depicting one leisurely shepherd's song after another, the original bucolic collection, the *Idylls* of the third century BCE attributed to the Hellenistic poet Theocritus, appear to prioritize style and setting over substance and thereby depended on a relatively unproblematic representation of rural ecologies.¹⁷⁷ Fenced in by forests, the world of the shepherd became the boundaries of the pastoral poem, a genre that would blossom at least once in most poetic traditions, from antiquity to early modern Italy — each of the four poets studied here wrote pastorals — and well beyond.

By the time the pastoral mode reaches the “[s]ummer” of its literary fortune,¹⁷⁸ with the *Eclogues* Vergil composes by 38 BCE,¹⁷⁹ the genre and its countryside setting are presented as fully conterminal. An exchange in the first song, for example, not only imagines the act of pastoral song as conceived within — and with inspiration from — the forest but is actively perpetuated by a seemingly intelligent acoustic environment:

Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi
silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena;
[...]

¹⁷⁷ On the ecological realism in the *Idylls* see Elze Kegel-Brinkgreve, *The Echoing Woods: Bucolic and Pastoral from Theocritus to Wordsworth* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1990), 10-16.

¹⁷⁸ The seasonal divisions in the history of pastoral literature are Mark Payne's; see his entry “Pastoral”, in Richard Eldridge, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 117-138, 121.

¹⁷⁹ For the dating of Vergil's *Eclogues* see Henry Rushton Fairclough, “Introduction”, in *Virgil*, tr. Henry Rushton Fairclough, ed. George Patrick Goold, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000), 1:1-22, 1:2.

[...] tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra
formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas.¹⁸⁰

Eager to reflect social and political questions relevant to urban readers, Vergil's eclogues appear to do the very opposite, by eliminating any reference to life beyond the countryside. Indeed, to maximize its capacity to signify, Vergil capitalizes on the inherent metaliterary capacity built into the genre. Mark Payne recalls that while Hellenistic audiences understood tragic and comic theatre as having ancient therapeutic properties, pastoral poetry emerges late, with no apparent physiological objective¹⁸¹ — and with no attempt to hide its status as a performance. The pastoral becomes the metapoetic genre *par excellence*, setting the stage for centuries of reprises and adaptations.

The genre may also have offered the four poets studied in this dissertation a thematic antecedent for metaliterary constructions of the forest in works that lay outside the pastoral genre proper. One example of such inspiration, Boccaccio's critique of Theocritus's pastorals — that they lacked significance “preter quod cortex ipse verborum demonstrat”¹⁸² — already elides rhetorical commentary with botanical vocabulary in the same way that his *Decameron*, discussed below, will describe its narrative scale and narrative setting as a “campo” (*Dec.* 2.8.3). So the pastoral, a poetic mode inseparable from the geographical specificity of its setting, may have planted the seed for metaliterary settings in poetry much less strictly defined by the thematics of its genre.

Many of these connections between the material world and an authored text had well be established by the early fourteenth century, when Boccaccio begins ideating his frame

¹⁸⁰ See Vergil, *Eclogues*, in *Virgil*, tr. Henry Rushton Fairclough, ed. George Patrick Goold, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000), 1:24-95, 1.4-5.

¹⁸¹ Payne, “Pastoral”, 117-118. For the relationship between self-care and pastoral poetry, however belated, see Federico Schneider, *Pastoral Drama and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

¹⁸² See letter 23, addressed to Martino da Signo and dated to around 1344, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Epistolarum quae supersunt*, in *Opere latine minori*, ed. Aldo Francesco Massèra (Bari: Laterza, 1928), 107-227, 216.

narratives, and would have already left imprints on both cosmological theory and theories of literary composition. The question of the textual nature of the world, a fundamental aspect of the dominant cosmologies in early modern Europe, no doubt informed the worldview of the poets studied here but it is the inverse question, concerning the worldlike nature of texts, that will be of most interest to this chapter and the one to follow it. Central to the discussion of the awareness of literary worlds exhibited by the *Decameron* are the notions of a narrative's spatiality, believability and subjection to invisible external forces like chance, aspects all passed down to Boccaccio's time by various works of concrete, pastoral and cosmological poetry. The *Decameron* will complicate the conditions for literary worldmaking inherited by these traditions by introducing strangeness, variety and artifice, factors endemic to the genre of the framed collection of novellas that Boccaccio perfects in his most ambitious work. Some of the more dynamic narrative worlds created in his collection present an obvious indebtedness to their forest settings, a space at odds with the highly manicured gardens in the macrotexts and the macronarrator's repeated description of his text as a garden. The remainder of this chapter reads these forests as introducing tension to this literary self-imagination, a tension that corresponds to the overall complication of the literary system inherited by the *Decameron*, the rudimentary world of the premodern novella.

Measuring Narrative Organization

It is, to start, slightly dizzying to map the layers of externality and referentiality built into the *Decameron* proper. Readers are greeted with what might paradoxically be called authorial paratexts, the title and subtitle that, although grammatically detached from an authorial voice retain the instant rigor of authority and gesture toward editorial propriety. There follows a proem that, while establishing a bond between the oppressed women who read at home and

the sympathetic older man who wanders the city, nonetheless provides no specifics as to his identity or geographic situation. A rubric establishes that at that point “Comincia la Prima giornata del Decameron” (1.α.1) and inaugurates the paratextual apparatus woven across the collection, the wry descriptions of novellas and the themes of the day that often assume a the distance of a compiler or editor, boiling complex stories down to simple summaries that at times contain their own punchlines.

The prose that follows the rubric will present two narrative perspectives sequentially: first, “la dimostrazione fatta dall’autore per che cagione avvenisse di doversi quelle persone, che appresso si mostrano, ragunare a ragionare insieme” and then — “dopo” — proper diegesis describing how “sotto il regimento di Pampinea si ragiona di quello che piú aggrada a ciascheduno” (1.α.1), recounted in the third person by an omniscient narrator. The “autore”, now within the bounds of the present-tense narrative, reveals himself to be living in the “egregia città di Fiorenza” 1,348 years after the “fruttifera incarnazione” (1.α.8). One of the most precious documents in the history of the bubonic plague,¹⁸³ the hyperrealistic description of the “mortifera pestilenza” (1.α.8) goes on for pages, creeping from the spectacles of death visible in streets and piazzas into the panicked mind of the plague victim, until proving too difficult even for the narrator, at which point he excuses himself:

A me medesimo increbbe andarmi tanto tra tante miserie ravolgendolo: per che, volendo omai lasciare star quella parte di quelle che io acconciamente posso schifare, dico che [...] addivenne, sí come io poi da persona degna di fede sentii, che [...] si ritrovarono sette giovani donne (1.intro.49).

Notable here is the spatiality that the narrator conjures in order to shield himself from discomfort, wishing to *lasciare stare quella parte* of the miseries among which he was

¹⁸³ On the documentation of the plague of 1348 see Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Ballantine, 1978), 92-125.

mentally while at the same time receding into the scarcely visible domain of the third-person narrator.

The passing of the narrative torch effected here depends on a conception of the story as spatially compartmentalized, as is already suggested by the sequence of paratexts that construct the borders of the *Decameron*, the frame narrative and, as readers will soon discover, the individual tales. The shift from the first-person account to the third-person frame tale is likewise carried out by affecting physical distance, as the youths move out of Florence into their countryside retreat and only there will they become narrators themselves. While perhaps illustrating in scenic terms the psychological fugue characteristic of witnesses to trauma, the *Decameron* certainly imagines itself as spatial, containing planes of narratives negotiated by explicitly architectural boundaries.

Indeed, the spatiality with which the narrator imagines the unfolding of his text has already been announced, for in one of the earliest metaphors the *Decameron* offers for itself, the author conjures not only a spatial identity but a topographical one as well and, like the boundary imposed by the narrator in the introduction to the first day, this environmental metaphor will be an index to several ambitions ascribed to the *Decameron*. In the first sentence following the rubric that announces the start of the first day, the narrator mentions his “dolorosa ricordazione della pestifera mortalità trapassata” (1.α.2) but then cuts himself off, assuring his readers, “non voglio per ciò che questo di più avanti leggere vi spaventi” (1.α.3). The narrator’s brief vision of the devastating plague is presented as a point of departure:

Questo orrido cominciamento vi fia non altramenti che a’ camminanti una montagna aspra e erta, presso alla quale un bellissimo piano e dilettevole sia reposto, il quale tanto più viene lor piacevole quanto maggiore è stata del salire e dello smontare la gravezza (1.α.4).

The Dantesque character of this inaugural image of the *Decameron* is unmistakable and announces Boccaccio's overarching ambition in this text to rewrite Dante's *Commedia* — to which Boccaccio himself is rumored to have added the qualification *Divina*¹⁸⁴ — in a humanist key.

The *Decameron*'s relationship to Dante's poem will inform the analysis of the novella of Nastagio degli Onesti at the close of this chapter but the broader metaliterary investigation of narrative space in Boccaccio's writing presented first can profit from recognizing a synecdoche effected here between the foreboding mountain at the opening of Dante's *Commedia* and the poem as a whole. As the previous chapter has argued, Dante's poem represents itself in its landscapes, where the "selva oscura" (*Inf.* 1.2) represents the immoral literary context in which he begins, the mountaintop points to the poem's entirely sacred ending and the territory between them is the space of the story bridging the two. The narrator of the *Decameron* recognizes the metaliterary settings of the *Commedia* and conjures it here at the opening of another midlife masterpiece, one in which the narrator here does not aspire to climb the mountain but rather flee it entirely.

By imagining the collection of tales to follow as a delightful meadow, the *Decameron* not only inaugurates itself in a Dantesque key but also varies on the same identification between the landscape and his literary project that had opened the *Commedia*. The macrotext of Boccaccio's project will largely concern flight, as indicated in this first metaphor: the first-person narrator's flight into third-person reportage, the flight of the *brigata* out of Florence, the narrators' flight from one exquisitely furnished storytelling site to another and the rhetorical flight from the day's thematic homogeneity Dioneo enjoys at the end of every day.

¹⁸⁴ The first appearance of the adjective *divina* in the title appears to be in Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, paragraph 185; see the edition of Luigi Sasso, *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (Milan: Garzanti, 1995).

This initial metaphor also establishes a link between the *Decameron* and fields, one that will be further exploited in a remark by a narrator of the *brigata*, discussed below, about the “campo” in which they tell their tales. While this opening introduces the self-presentation of the *Decameron* as a revision of the *Commedia* that instead tends towards comfort and normalization, a tendency crystallized in the novella of Nastagio. The comparison with such a spatial work of literature confirms an intuitive understanding of the *Decameron* not just as a space but as a space of specifically pretended character, a garden where the horror of the organic world is held in check. Such an identification is seen in other moments where the narrators remark on their task of narrating in spatial terms. Close readings of these overt metaliterary expressions suggest that the space that the *Decameron* uses to refer to its components is one where the spectre of death and unpredictability gets mediated by sensuality and practicality.

In the sequence of the hundred *novelle* shared by the ten mannered youths seeking respite from the plague devastating their hometown of Florence, Panfilo has just concluded the seventh novella of the second day, the vast naval tale that sees the Saracen princess Alatiel swept across the Mediterranean, and his audience is finally laughing off their great suspense. As the next narrator to take up the organizing theme of the day, that of the “lieto fine” (2.α.1), Elissa remarks on its breadth.

Ampissimo campo è quello per lo quale noi oggi spaziando andiamo, né ce n'è alcuno che, non che uno aringo ma diece non ci potesse assai leggiermente correre, sí copioso l'ha fatto la fortuna delle sue nuove e gravi cose; e per ciò, vegnendo di quelle, che infinite sono, a raccontare alcuna, dico (2.8.3) —

and there she begins her tale. The spatial imagery of this brief observation hints at the overall organization of the *Decameron*, a geography that is articulated through the duality of *mortifero* and *fruttifero*, artificial and organic, forces that work not as opposites but

cooperatively and in carefully delineated dynamics, as will be discussed below. The reader's first intuition that Elissa's remark betrays a metanarrative concern is the very attention she pays to the topic as a practical element of their storytelling. One can plot onto this "[a]mpissimo campo" ten stories with happy endings, she declares, referring to the ten stories of the present day with an almost authorial satisfaction. But the field could indeed be wide enough to embrace anything, as Elissa's reference to the infinite potential of the supernatural personification of Fortuna suggests.¹⁸⁵ So with the character and the author who necessarily accompanies her already sharing an admiration for their subject matter, the reader too might be called to apply Elissa's quip to another story with a *lieto fine*, the *commedia umana* that is the macrotext of the *Decameron* itself.¹⁸⁶

It is worth considering further the space this metaphor creates. The application of the word "campo" to refer to the discourse of comedy comes as no surprise, as the word continues today to refer to arrangements with no basis in physical space. This "campo", though, is immediately qualified by a designer and a purpose: it is a field that Fortuna has equipped so copiously, Elissa remarks, that it could easily host ten jousting lists. The identity of the garden's outfitter is surely no chance. Through her reference to Fortuna, Elissa may be alluding specifically to the narrative motor behind the mishaps of Alatiel, which Panfilo has just exposed in the previous tale and which resembles the same wind-associated agent animating all the naval battles of the second day, such as in the tales of Landolfo Rufolo (*Dec.* 2.4) and Madama Beritola (2.6). But Fortuna also plays a locomotive role in the

¹⁸⁵ On the role of Fortuna in early modern European cosmologies see Howard Rollin Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 8-34.

¹⁸⁶ Francesco De Sanctis proposes the *Decameron* as the "commedia umana" in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* §9.19: "Ecco, a così breve distanza, la commedia e l'anticommedia, la «divina commedia» e la sua parodia, la commedia umana!". See the edition of Grazia Melli Fioravanti, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 3rd ed. (Milan: BUR, 2002), 1:80.

macrotext that reinforces the function of Elissa's comment as a consideration of the work as a whole, for also ascribed to Fortuna is the initial coincidence that three young men should have chanced upon seven maidens in need of escorts to accompany them out of Florence and thereby bring the *Decameron's* macronarrative to a suitable stage outside the city: spotting them walk into Santa Maria Novella, Pampinea remarks, "Ecco che la fortuna a' nostri cominciamenti è favorevole" (1.α.80). And outside the text one need look no further than *Decasibus virorum illustrorum*, accounts of famous falls (*casi*) from the wheel of fortune Boccaccio begins in 1355 and likely finishes by 1374, likely to locate Fortuna as a perennial font of narrative thrust for the prolific author. So in Elissa's reference to the engine of *Fortuna*, a seemingly careless remark, continues to suggest a metaliterary link between the micronarrator's rhetorical field and the macronarrator's elaborate spatial narrative.

At this point a brief excursus may be useful to link the idea of Fortuna, seen in this introduction to be a motor for the unfolding of the text, to the forest settings that will be the concern of the second half of this study. In several of the tales in the *Decameron*, such as those of Madama Beritola (2.6) and Cimone the *stilnovista* (5.1), protagonists are drawn through the woods by the directional force of Fortuna. Narrative poets before and after Boccaccio — particularly in the chivalric romance tradition — exploited the coterminality of the forest with fortune in order to stage fantastic yet verisimilar episodes into their larger network, but the concepts of woods have overlapped for centuries, if not since their original linguistic codification. Early modern poets, as the following chapter will illustrate with the works of Bernardus Sylvestris, linked randomness with the ecosystems typical to the *silva* but even these thinkers were drawing on ancient Greek associations between the chaotic state of before material formation and *ῥῆμα*, the word for forest or lumber. These associations are

fully traced out in the previous chapter of this dissertation but for now it suffices to note that the significant connection made here between Fortuna and the propulsion of narrative, both the macronarrative and the micronarrative, will recur throughout the *Decameron* in several constructions of the forest.

Returning to Elissa's field, a reader may also note how immediately the space is quantified: she boasts of the number of jousts it could host, not one but ten, thanks to Fortuna's infinite supply of exotic threats. This sequence of numbers is significant in that it sets up a scale of increasing size. The numbers refer quite plainly to those behind the narrative itinerary of the *brigata*, which coincides with the *Decameron* itself: ten stories for ten days. Evident in such a sequence are the value and promise of the overall matrix, a system of ten integrating single stories, each one with an intrinsic individuality, which, when considered as highly intertextual whole, produces an infinite number of ideas. But Elissa does not measure the field as satisfactory either for one joust or for the potential infinity of jousting material, but specifies that "diece [...] ci potesse assai leggiemente correre" — not only because there will in fact be ten tales but because the number ten offers a balance between the extremes of singularity and infinity.

Crucial for the spaces of the *Decameron* are the virtues of balance and proportion. At the close of the fourth day, for example, the youths take to their various other pastimes, some leaving through a garden "la cui bellezza non era da dover troppo tosto rincrescere" (4.6.7). This passage indicates that the beauty of the organic world in *Decameron* can be cultivated to an unpleasant degree. Also of note is Elissa's notion that the field can support the ten jousts "leggiemente" employs a key term in Boccaccio's aesthetic vocabulary. While referring to the grace and elegance that underpin every move of the collection's exemplarily genteel

narrators, the notion of lightness harkens to an organizing principal that sets the *Decameron* apart from the style of Boccaccio's earlier works, such as the ponderous Latinate *Filocolo*, composed around 1336.¹⁸⁷ In the *Lezioni americane* that Italo Calvino prepared immediately before his death in 1985, the first lecture advocates *leggerezza*, which is emblemized by a novella from the sixth day of the *Decameron* in which the poet Cavalcanti skirts his detractors by leaping over a tombstone.¹⁸⁸ The synecdoche of Calvino's citation here tacitly endorses the lightness that the *Decameron* embodies throughout, from the content of its stories to the realism of its language.

The logic behind Elissa's metaphor implies that the field might actually be divided into ten jousting lists. This purpose-driven marking of the grounds can refer outwards to the teleological environment in which she speaks. In the first and second of the narrator's three suburban outposts, manicured gardens that conjure marvel and host narratives of equivalent marvel are punctuated throughout by clearings designed for other activities: gaming tables, dining furniture, seating and dancing areas, "canaletti [...] artificiosamente fatti" (3.α.10), and, most importantly, a solid fortification of walls. The organic world in these gardens is subjugated to specific human activities, social and ritual in nature, a dynamic seen in the novellas as well.

While readers of the micronarratives of the *Decameron* do occasionally see sweeping geographies unfurl — such as the one Elissa will recount after this remark, which sees the Count of Anguversa led across the British Isles and France and which takes on as much of an epic, dynastic character as any novella in the collection — on the whole readers get a much more local experience when one specific city or town is the chosen scene of the novella,

¹⁸⁷ For the dating of all Boccaccio's works see Branca, "Vita e opere".

¹⁸⁸ The novella is 6.9 and is treated in *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), 15.

observing a more cohesive unity of place. Indeed, on days like the sixth, when the theme centers on discourse and *ingegno* rather than plot, the setting becomes a mere setpiece, a backdrop for the slice of human drama staged therein. Readers may recall the preponderance of small enclosed spaces that feature prominently in the *Decameron*: bathtubs, chests, cells, shacks, hiding spaces, stables, grottos, pits, wells, turrets, cracks in walls. Readers may also intuit that some of the flabbier novellas, like the tale of the three sisters and three lovers (4.7), openly struggle to compress an excess of characters or narrative material into the limited boundaries of the novella. Could such claustrophobic environments bespeak a self-presentation of the *Decameron* as compartmentalized, aware of the miniature spaces that make up its monumental ensemble? As narrative gardens, the spaces of the larger verbal production of the macronarrative, how these tales cultivated, sparsely or excessively? Though such questions can only be hinted at here, they nonetheless serve to mark an intriguing line of inquiry into the geographical, structural and perhaps even mnemonic conceptualization of Boccaccio's prose masterpiece.

For to look back to the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* (1341-1342), Boccaccio's first frame narrative and a direct formal antecedent to the *Decameron*, the settings of the stories are endless and, at least in Fiammetta's last narrative, endowed with the potential to transform the diegetic reality, a different narratological potentiality entirely. Adiona recounts her visit to the goddess Pomona, whose garden is as graceful and manicured as those of the *Decameron* but far lusher, containing "alberi d'ogni maniera" and so many plants and animals that the narrator interrupts her own cataloging to ask, "Ma perché mi stendo io in queste menome cose?"¹⁸⁹ It is indeed a boundless space, for although circumscribed by rings

¹⁸⁹ *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* 26.28 and 26.15, respectively, in the edition of Antonio Enzo Quaglio in *Tutte le opere*, gen. ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1964), 2:665-835.

of trees and ultimately by heavy walls, readers are still afforded an expansive perspective from without, since Adiona can see and describe the enclosure only by looking “per picciolo cancello”.¹⁹⁰ The vantage of the narrative is thus emphasizing its own representative limitations before an infinitely vast subject. Narratologically too, Adiona’s novella is only opened up by its context: the first-person relation will actually develop the etiology of one of the characters of the third-person macrotext of the *Comedia*, unlike with the autonomous novellas of the *Decameron* that describe characters unrelated to the company of narrators.

The *Comedia* even features an antecedent to the narrative arithmetic Elissa bases around ten jousts with Adiona’s description of the open space of the garden:

in picciolo poggio levati, per luogo de’ faticati sono di pietra graziosi
scanni, li quali tanto dal muro con la loro ampiezza si scostano che, non
togliendo luogo a chi sedesse, largo spazio concedono ad erbe di mille
ragioni.¹⁹¹

As a metaliterary construction, this garden points to the expansiveness of the *Comedia* as a whole, visible in its impulse to surpass boundaries by transitioning between third-person first-person and narration, by alternating verse with prose and by offering a final disclaimer that justifies both a literal and an allegorical interpretive program. More relevant to this dissertation than any precise character the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* may ascribe itself through this metaphor is the recognition of a Boccaccian commonality in the measurement of diegetic space in terms of the amplitude of the discourse containing it. In the earlier frame structure, however, the ambitious promise of a thousand stories lacks the sense of balance and proportion in the later *Decameron* to which Elissa alludes with her measured claim of ten jousts.

¹⁹⁰ *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* 26.27.

¹⁹¹ *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* 26.12.

It is lastly useful to consider these suburban retreats as spaces of cooperation between death-dealing and live-giving forces, for it can also be argued that the balanced landscaping of the organic world in the *Decameron* articulates a corresponding dynamic between the natural world as *mortifero* and *fruttifero*. In the introduction, what had contributed to the horror was the subversion of the fruitfulness of the natural timetable: the “mortifera” plague hits at springtime in a year measured by counting from the “fruttifera incarnazione del Figliuolo di Dio” (1.α.8). In an inversion of the familiar fruiteous rhythms of the organic world, pustules now blossom like rancid flowers, social gatherings turn fatal and people “non come uomini ma quasi come bestie morieno” (1.α.43). The narrator’s spatial reach exhibits a correspondingly organic growth, spreading from public spheres into private homes and ultimately into the very hearts of his fellow Florentines.¹⁹² The harsh environment that aligns with this *mortifero* impulse, while plainly one of danger, is just as consistently one of generation. The plague generates the narrators’ flight from the city, the manicured landscapes furnish the seats for storytelling and the stories often generate allusions or even continuations among them in mock competition.¹⁹³ The manicured landscapes are worth considering further, however, for they repeat this cycle of death and generation with a similarly metaliterary perspective.

When readers consider the gardens and the *villetta* of the narrators’ sojourns, they might see environments subverted by a surprisingly organic human hand. Perhaps the most striking instance of this subversion is the seemingly spontaneous arrangement of the settings: surprising bouquets of flowers in the bedrooms, tables set for meals, fountains already flowing. These environments emerge perfectly disposed — the verb *apparecchiare* appears

¹⁹² Giuseppe Mazzotta’s illuminations on the introduction are of great influence here: see the first chapter of his *The World at Play in Boccaccio’s Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), especially 17-21.

¹⁹³ See the novellas featuring Calandrino: 8.3, 8.6, 9.3 and 9.5.

several times in the macronarraive with no subject¹⁹⁴ — and are often described with strings of past participles as though they had blossomed up by nature alone. These spaces immediately delight the narrators and generate their praise, further evidence of their fruitfulness. The description of the so-called Valle delle Donne, their third storytelling site, sets a standard for ambiguous artificiality, as the reader is left only to wonder as to the nature of its topological perfection, seeming “quantunque artificio della natura e non manual”.¹⁹⁵

But the metaphoric jousting lists Elissa envisions in the second day might again be the best crucible for the balanced teleological appropriation of the natural world in Boccaccio’s macronarratives. The list is a limitation upon an organic space that hosts its human purpose so “leggiermente” that it incites Elissa to pursue narrative action. The joust, again, is itself a play of death and generation, the fetishization of a physical threat for a social or political gain. Artificial environments and playacted threats — these are the semblances of antagonism that reveal Boccaccio’s profound preoccupation with the potential of the text, a world at times elaborately topographed, where something can be born from nothing, fruit from destruction, art from threat of danger. For what is the *Decameron* but a jousting list, a space where the reader can experience the most dramatic deaths and most elating victories from the sanctuary of what Pier Massimo Forni has called the “incolumnità” characteristic of all literature?¹⁹⁶

Many of the aspects of the *Decameron* implied by Elissa’s self-referential metaphor find contrast in another metaliterary space represented later in the macronarrative. Assuming her reign over the ninth day of storytelling from Lauretta, the queen of the eighth, Emilia

¹⁹⁴ See 1.α.98-108 and 5.α.2-5.

¹⁹⁵ The description of the garden is in 6.ω.20. The name “Valle delle Donne” first appears in 6.ω.18.

¹⁹⁶ The concept arose in a 21 September 2009 session of Forni’s seminar *Boccaccio I* at Johns Hopkins University.

announces her suspension of thematic prescriptivity using a well executed if unoriginal metaphor:

Dilettose donne assai manifestamente veggiamo che, poi che i buoi alcuna parte del giorno hanno faticato sotto il giogo ristretti, quegli esser dal giogo alleviati e disciolti, e liberamente dove lor più piace, per li boschi lasciati sono andare alla pastura: e veggiamo ancora non esser men belli ma molto più i giardini di varie piante fronzuti che i boschi ne' quali solamente querce veggiamo; per le quali cose io estimo, avendo riguardo quanti giorni sotto certa legge ristretti ragionato abbiamo, che, sì come a bisognosi, di vagare alquanto e vagando riprender forze a rientrar sotto il giogo non solamente sia utile ma oportuno (*Dec. 8.ω.4*).

Her remark is immediately explained as a metaphor for the need for respite from constrained storytelling but, shortly after, the metonymic link between the site of narration and the breadth of narration will again be collapsed, when in the introduction to her day Emilia leads the youths to the woods for a frolic:

Emilia levatasi fece le sue compagne e i giovani parimente chiamare; li quali venuti e appresso alli lenti passi della reina avviatisi, infino a un boschetto non guari al palagio lontano se n'andarono, e per quello entrati, videro gli animali, sì come cavriuoli, cervi e altri, quasi sicuri da' cacciatori per la soprastante pistolenza, non altramenti aspettagli che se senza tema o dimestichi fossero divenuti. E ora a questo e ora a quell'altro appressandosi, quasi giugnere gli dovessero, faccendogli correre e saltare, per alcuno spazio sollazzo presero (*Dec. 9.α.2*).

With the afternoon heat they return home and reassemble in the garden, “tutti di frondi di quercia inghirlandati, con le man piene o d'erbe odorifere o di fiori” (*Dec. 9.α.4*).

This forest excursus reveals much about the character of the *Decameron* and the methods it adopts to describe itself. As with Elissa's remarks — and those of Adiona in the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* — Emilia here links the thematic structure of their storytelling with the topography in which the storytelling takes place. But instead of establishing this link through measurement, as had Adiona with her thousand conversations and Elissa with her ten jousts — Emilia finds the similarity by evaluating the character of the space and the experience of its inhabitants. The metaphor thus continues a tradition in Boccaccio's frame narratives to conceive of the literary work in spatial terms but here, towards the close of the

Decameron, Emilia presents the text not as a garden, as in the earlier remarks, but as a forest. Forests and gardens, far from opposite environments, behave like funhouse mirrors of each other, the garden being the site where the realm of Natura, exemplified by the forest, is tamed by the artful human hands, where marvels are substituted for the monsters of woodland wilderness. Forming two poles in the self-referential topography, the manicured fields and lush woods where the narrators briefly sojourn signal two counteracting impulses in the *Decameron*: the prioritization of balance, grace and skill and the need to flee from confining strictures. This seemingly paradoxical preservation of both balance and chaos can be seen on the structural level in the narrative decision, arrived with the consent of the internal narrators, to exempt Dioneo from the required adherence to the day's theme, a rule that consistently ensures inconsistency.

As poles in the spectrum of literary self-identification legible in the *Decameron*, the gardens and the forest of Boccaccio's metaliterary imagination do not share an antagonistic relationship but cooperate in the narrative system exemplified earlier with the interplay between mortiferous and fruttiferous elements in the macrotext's presentation of its own generation. This relationship is seen throughout the *Decameron*, particularly in its references to the plague, the devastating event that led the Florentine youths to such a delightful respite. In Emilia's outing to the woods, the same dynamic of *pro bono malum* appears in the populations of woodland animals, which were thriving after the death of so many hunters from the plague. These animals can easily be read as mirrors of the characters who had already adopted a bovine metaphor for themselves, throwing off the yoke of thematic constraints and running wild in the forest of narrative orderlessness. Cavorting wherever they please, these forest creatures thus represent the narrators newly freed from the monotonous

curation of literature appropriate for genteel gardens. The forest, a space of risk — for animals and humans alike, as related by several tales in the *Decameron* treated below — becomes a space of delight, while the garden, designed especially for human comfort, becomes a tool for domestication. In the representation of its own structure and dynamics, the *Decameron* recognizes the vital cycle of *fruttifero* and *mortifero* feeding endlessly back into each other.

If the macronarrative seeks from the very beginning to communicate a conceptualization of the *Decameron* in spatial and even environmental terms — the text as a garden, the garden and forest as diegetic metaphors for the text containing it — the reader's overall impression is that fictions are inextricably linked to their places, neither their sites of production nor the settings wherein the stories unfold. While the first half of this chapter has already demonstrated the coterminality between the settings of the macronarrative and the macronarrative itself, this second half will investigate the ways in which the micronarratives betray the same metaliterary connection to their settings.

Forests and the Space of the Novella

All stories depend on their settings to some extent but what makes a setting truly metaliterary? The primary method of evaluating metaliterary import in the forests of the *Decameron* is an examination of the correlations between the forest setting and the novella containing it. These correlations can be seen in one or more ways: the forest provides an ecology that satisfies the need for brevity, believability and surmountable obstacles. The metaliterary value of the space thus derives from either the degree to which the micronarrative depends on the setting for its plot or the pattern of allusions that link the

landscape either to the *Decameron* itself or to other texts in its orbit. The following sections will first consider tales where the plot is so dependent on the forest.

The forest can occupy such a significant amount of the story itself that it becomes the container within which the story fully elapses, a setting coterminous with the setting. This is the case with novella 5.3, the tale of the Roman lovers Pietro Boccamazza and Agnolella Saullo, which devotes nearly all the space of the narrative to the youths' escapades in the woods. In love but prevented from marrying her due to her plebian rank, the two find the path toward consummating their love a "via impedita" (*Dec.* 5.3.7) and thus decide to flee Rome towards Anagni. About eight miles out, perhaps at Casale Ciampino,¹⁹⁷ "dovendo a man destra tenere si misero per una via a sinistra", on which they are spotted "subitamente" (*Dec.* 5.3.10) by enemies of the Orsini family to whom Pietro is allied. Agnolella flees on horseback "verso una selva grandissima" (*Dec.* 5.3.11) and, after the enemy knights are themselves "soprapresi" (5.3.14) by another squadron, Pietro takes off in her direction. "Ma non vedendo per la selva né via né sentiero, né pedata di caval conoscendovi" (*Dec.* 5.3.15), Pietro begins to worry for his and Agnolella's safety, given the "fiere che nelle selve sogliono abitare" (5.3.16), and spends the night up an oak tree. Agnolella meanwhile "s'abbatté a un sentieruolo" (*Dec.* 5.3.21) that leads her to an old couple who warn her about the forest which "di dí e di notte e d'amici e di nemici vanno di male brigate assai" (5.3.27). She reasons that "è molto meno esser dagli uomini straziata che sbranata per li boschi dalle fiere" (*Dec.* 5.3.29) and decides to spend the night with them. Around daybreak, their cottage is raided and Agnolella's horse is stolen, at which point the couple offers to walk her to a castle, where she is received by the mistress, wife of Liello from the Campo di Fiore branch of the Orsini family. Back in the oak tree, Pietro watches his horse be devoured by some

¹⁹⁷ See Cornelia Coulter, "The Road to Alagna", *Philological Quarterly* 18 (1939): 332-336, 335.

twenty wolves and “imaginossi di non dover mai di quella selva potere uscire” (*Dec.* 5.3.45) but then he spots a campfire, where he meets two shepherds that lead him to the same Orsini castle. The lovers reunite and the Orsini mistress arranges for their marriage, assuring them she will reconcile their family’s discord, a feat accomplished in the last sentence of the novella. In keeping with the theme of happy endings, Pietro “con molto riposo e piacere con la sua Agnolella infino alla lor vecchiezza si visse” (*Dec.* 5.3.54).

In his study of the enduring connection between the forest and the definition of human civilization, emblemized by Giambattista Vico’s pronouncement that, in establishing a civilization, “prima furono le selve”,¹⁹⁸ Robert Harrison reads this novella as a narrative of social development, wherein the two “virgins in the literal as well as the psychological sense” learn of the calamitous nature of desire.¹⁹⁹ The forest, repeatedly marked by numerical details, represents for Harrison the clash of the “one-against-many” animalism at the base of all human behavior, resolved only through the civil contract of marriage and attendant social negotiations.²⁰⁰ Leaving aside the psychological insights this reading offers, the value of Harrison’s analysis for this study is the recognition that the passage through the forest is not merely an exciting plot but also a structure with “implicit but deliberate literary logic”.²⁰¹

Readers may just as easily find the lovers’ quest to reunite as a metaliterary narrative dramatizing the characters’ search for a happy ending, the theme imposed by the day. Indeed, the context of the fifth day as a whole lends great metaliterary insight, for the day’s theme is directly albeit inversely related to that organizing the previous day. Concluding his reign of

¹⁹⁸ See *Principij di scienza nuova* 239 in Fausto Nicolini’s edition of Vico’s *Opere* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1953), 365-905. Harrison’s *Forests* opens with a discussion of the forest in Vico’s sequence of civilization; see 3-13.

¹⁹⁹ Harrison, *Forests*, 89.

²⁰⁰ *Forests*, 90.

²⁰¹ *Forests*, 89.

the fourth day, Filostrato remarks to Fiammetta that “meglio, dell’aspra giornata di oggi, che alcuna altra, con quella di domane queste nostre compagne racconsolar saprai” (*Dec.* 4.ω.3), to which she replies,

acciò che meglio t’avveggi di quello che fatto hai, infino da ora voglio e comando che ciascun s’apparecchi di dovere domane ragionare di ciò che ad alcuno amante, dopo alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti, felicemente avvenisse (4.ω.5).

Not only is the day inspired by the saddened mood of its participants but the same vocabulary of felicitousness occurs in the rubric for each day. The macronarrator announces that in the fifth day “si ragiona di ciò che a alcuno amante, dopo alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti, felicemente avvenisse” (*Dec.* 5.α.1), modeling himself on the preceding rubric, which established that in the fourth day “si ragiona di coloro li cui amori ebbero infelice fine” (4.α.1). Not only is the day’s overall tone inspired by the somberness of the previous day but the specific theme aims to rewrite the previous day as well.

Beyond the recurrence of the adjective “felice” in the self-referential moments of these days, several novellas encourage a metaliterary reading of the fifth day as a whole. One of the most famous tales of this day, if not the whole *Decameron*, describes the struggle of young Caterina to “udir cantar l’usignuolo” (*Dec.* 5.4.25) with her lover Ricciardo. They fall asleep after making love on the balcony and when her father spots her sleepily grasping Ricciardo’s “usignuolo” — a double entendre that profits not only from longstanding associations in Italian vernaculars between the penis and birds but also from a long literary tradition of love poetry inspired by nightingales — he is so amused he arranges for an immediate marriage.

A comical tale on its surface, the novella of the nightingale exhibits a deeper literary value when compared to a tale from the previous day that this one seems to retell: the novella

of Tancredi and Ghismonda has the same structure but differs remarkably in tone and detail. There, Ghismonda loves Guiscardo but her disapproving father responds in exaggeratedly severe ways, ultimately cutting out Guiscardo's heart, which Ghismonda will mix with poison and fatally consume. As Forni notes, the tale of the nightingale makes several allusions to its precedent, perhaps the most obvious being the narrator's remark that, when Ricciardo sees Caterina's father, "parve che gli fosse il cuore del corpo strappato".²⁰² When the youths were making love earlier in the tale, furthermore, their exclamations of ecstasy take on a metaliterary value: as if remembering the previous day's theme of unhappy loves, Ricciardo "Caterina, io ti priego che tu non mi facci morire amando" (*Dec.* 5.4.8), to which she responds "Volesses Idio che tu non facessi piú morire me!" (5.4.9). Forni rightly imagines these characters as aware of their status as characters, who depend on literary factors like theme and "characters who, feeling dangerously close to that tragic world, question their own placement in the world of the comic".²⁰³ Indeed, they are making sure they are in the right day and their gesture here exemplifies the metaliterary spirit embraced more enthusiastically in this day than perhaps anywhere else in the *Decameron*.

Beyond this tale, several other tales in the fifth day suggest a metaliterary valence, specifically the tales of Cimone and Nastagio degli Onesti. As will be discussed below, each novella also demonstrates Boccaccio's engagement with literary tradition: the boorish Cimone is transformed into a poet and a caricature of the *dolce stil novo* while Nastagio discovers a Dantesque spectacle that he exploits to win over his reluctant beloved. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to recognize the overall metaliterary character of the fifth days, seen in this and other tales, that might provide a context to evaluate its third tale, that of

²⁰² See Pier Massimo Forni, *Adventures in Speech: Rhetoric and Narration in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 35-36. The narrator's remark is in *Dec.* 5.4.42.

²⁰³ *Adventures in Speech*, 36.

the Roman lovers, not only as tale about a forest adventure but also as a metaliterary tale, a function that demonstrates how easily adventurous narratives can be derived from that setting.

The tale of the two Roman lovers, then, can easily be read as a metaliterary exercise in the most concise method of constructing a story. The reunion of the happy lovers can thus be read not only as an erotic quest taken by the characters but as a generic one undertaken by Elissa to complete the thematic objective of reconciling a potentially tragic love story. In this metatale, the forest comes across not only as not a setting but as a narrative expedient. Readers might consider the immediacy with which the plot unfolds once the couple enters the woods. The narrator underscores the automatic nature of the setting by attaching their first misadventure to a sentence Vittore Branca describes as “gentile e sognante”:

Ora avvenne che, non essendo a Pietro troppo noto il cammino, come forse otto miglia da Roma dilungati furono, dovendo a man destra tenere, si misero per una via a sinistra; né furono guari più di due miglia cavalcati che essi si videro vicini ad un castelletto del quale, essendo stati veduti, subitamente uscirono da dodici fanti.²⁰⁴

The distance is expressed negatively, not even two miles, while their antagonists “subitamente uscirono” (*Dec.* 5.3.13), the adverb hurrying out in front of the verb. These enemy knights are just immediately met by another troop, who “subitamente uscí addosso” (*Dec.* 5.3.13). Pietro flees, likewise “subitamente” (*Dec.* 5.3.14), only to spend “tutto il giorno” (5.3.17) wandering the forest and several hours hindering up an oak tree. While Piero does spend some time in the tree, this interval allows the narrator to alternate and describe Agnolella’s trajectory, which resumes a few hours earlier at her flight from the first set of knights. When the narrator returns to Pietro, it is the hour of “primo sonno” and a pack of wolves has just emerged. Boccaccio again introduces their swarming hurriedly, in the same

²⁰⁴ See *Dec.* 5.3.10; Branca’s observation is found on 621n7.

sentence that describes their arrival: “vide in sul primo sonno venir ben venti lupi, li quali tutti, come il ronzin videro, gli furon dintorno” (*Dec.* 5.3.43). The immediacy here is felt in the adverb “come”, both in its sense of ‘as soon as’ and in its position, nestled into the sentence such that that clause, like Pietro and his horse, are surrounded by wolves. The horse is disemboweled, again “subitamente” (*Dec.* 5.3.44) and Pietro “forte sbigottí, e imaginossi” incapable of ever leaving the forest. But he need only look in the other direction — “sí come quegli che sempre da torno guardava” (*Dec.* 5.3.46) — to see a bonfire, which he does immediately after his brief mourning, described in the finite present perfect tense. The sighting coincides with the seemingly immediate shift from a pre-dawn hour (*Dec.* 5.3.46: “già vicino al dí”) to full daylight (5.3.46: “il dí chiaro”), signaling to Pietro that the environment is now suitable for human passage.

This immediacy is one aspect of the forest that Boccaccio exploits to fashion a story out of nothing. Other characteristics of the environment involve the us-against-them, black-and-white logic of its inhabitants. The knights spot Pietro and immediately recognize him as “degli amici de’ nemici nostri” (*Dec.* 5.3.12), the Orsini family, while they in turn are assaulted by their own enemies. Their behavior is as spontaneous as the wolves and the brigands who raid the cottage where Agnolella lodges, both packs unable to see the horses outside the economy of their own material needs. A similar logic motivates the protagonists’ more fundamental struggle to survive in the forest, which in turn advances the plot: Pietro is forced to abandon his horse and thereby depend on the oak tree for shelter and a pair of shepherds for a guide while Agnolella is told that “di dí e di notte e d’amici e di nemici vanno di male brigate assai” who “farebbono dispiacere e vergongna” to her, the conditional

expressing, as Branca notes, “la certezza del fatto”.²⁰⁵ Her calculation that “è molto men male esser dagli uomini straziata che sbranata per li boschi dalle fiere” leads her to take shelter in the cottage.

The forest as a whole acts as a machine: while the protagonists seek to exit it, they in fact sink further into it, depending ever more on its human, vegetal and topographical features for survival. Indeed, they are ultimately only reunited and led back into the city through the “pietà” of the shephards, the elderly couple moved by the sight of Agnolella “così sola [...] per questa contrada” (*Dec.* 5.3.23) and the Orsini mistress who “ripresse molto” Pietro before being won over by his enduring commitment for Agnolella. For each of these interactions, the characters need only to appear at the right place in the right condition and the forest, acting through its native populations, will provide a resolution to the plot that it itself engendered. The following chapter on the similarly automatic plots of the *Orlando furioso* will investigate the forest as a literary ecology: a setting with immutable characteristics that interact with the characteristics of its travelers to generate plot developments unavailable without the limitations and advantages posed by the forest. Likely based on the same chivalric Northern European romances that Ariosto will too look back on, this novella of the *Decameron* is an excellent example of the immediacy and automatic nature of the forest ecology that the *Furioso* will explode.

Another feature common to the *Furioso* and this novella of the two Roman lovers is the presence — or lack thereof — of paths. Readers of the *Decameron* might note Dantesque overtones of this forest, which features “né via né sentiero, né pedata di caval” (*Dec.* 5.3.15) such that Agnolella “aveva la sua compagnia nella selva smaritta” (5.3.23). The allusions from key descriptions of the forest in *Inferno* 13 and 1, respectively, alert readers to a

²⁰⁵ See *Dec.* 5.3.27; Branca’s analysis is on 625n9.

deliberately literary construction. Might the forest of the *Decameron* not also appear as a metaliterary construction? Readers may consider the one path mentioned in the story, the “sentieruolo” that leads Agnolella to the “buono uomo” (*Dec.* 5.3.21) and his wife, as a metaliterary symbol for the narrative progression that moves linearly towards an ending, much like the “diritta via” (*Inf.* 1.3) represents the narrative trajectory directly to God that Dante finds impossible. The pathless forest in which Pietro is stranded likewise represents his state of being waylaid within the narrative: “tornando indietro che egli si credeva innanzi andare” (*Dec.* 5.3.17), he progresses through the narrative unable to find “niuna persona” from which to derive any other development in the plot. In another, fainter example of the language knowing the story, the narrator writes that “niuna persona” (5.3.17) responds to Pietro in the woods, a phrase echoed in the elderly man’s warning to Agnolella that “Niuna persona ci è altri che noi” (5.3.33). As he waits in the tree, prevented from moving spatially, the narrative alternates to Agnolella who, two sentences later, will find the “sentieruolo” that leads to the happy ending.

Expressed in a cliché repeated often in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Boccaccio’s model text and throughout the *Decameron*, this happy hending alerts readers to the metaliterary attention of the narrator. Elissa several times has her characters refer to their *sventure*: “Pietro sventurato” (*Dec.* 5.3.17) curses his “disavventura” (5.3.19) which he recounts as such to the shepherds (5.3.30: “contata loro la sua disavventura”) while Agnolella cries about her “sventura” (5.3.30) at the cottage. Might Elissa be winking throughout the story to mark it as self-consciously adhering to the theme of the day, that of lovers overcoming “fieri e sventurati accidenti”? Might not the lovers’ fear of “fiere”, mentioned four times in this novella (*Dec.* 5.3.16, 5.3.18, 5.3.29 and 5.3.51), be a literalization of the

fieri accidenti that await them in this day? A metaliterary reading of the novella finds additional value beyond its superficial charm, as a tale that adopts the most literal example of a story of overcoming misadventure, by stringing characters into a narrative ecology that perpetuates itself, providing obstacles and reveals the only path out of its misadventure-laden realm. In this novella, as with the entirety of the *Orlando furioso*, the forest is the story: here only seven sentences describe their action before turning into the woods and only one treats their return and the eventual resolution of their families' discord. Elissa is not interested in the social dynamics behind the star-crossed lovers, which she does not describe very clearly here, but instead rather on describing the purest and most literal form of a literary obstacle: the entry into the woods.

The same immediacy of the forest environment is seen in a later novella, that of Talano d'Imolese. In a tale of the ninth day even more psychologically suggestive than that of the Roman lovers yet not treated in Harrison's *Forests*, the forest seems to be the purest font of narrative generation. Talano d'Imolese, a gentleman married to a woman who is exceedingly "bizzarra, spiacevole e ritrosa" (*Dec.* 9.7.4) and reluctant to the will of her husband, dreams that she is passing through "un bosco assai bello" (9.7.5) near their house and gets devoured by a wolf. When she recounts the dream to Talano, he begs her to stay at home but she says that interprets his vision as "quello che tu vorresti vedere" (*Dec.* 9.7.8) and takes off into the woods, where she imagines "egli per certo dee aver data posta a qualche cattiva" (9.7.10). She hides in a thicket, "guardando or qua or là se alcuna persona venir vedesse" (*Dec.* 9.7.11). Just as Talano predicted, a wolf emerges and charges with the same immediacy seen in the tale of the Roman lovers: "né poté ella, poi che veduto l'ebbe, appena dire 'Domine, aiutami', che il lupo le si fu avventato alla gola, e presala forte, la

cominciò a portar via come se stata fosse un piccolo agnelletto” (*Dec.* 9.7.12). She is found by shepherds and returned home, where she regrets not heeding the omen of the dream, even when doing so “niente le costava” (*Dec.* 9.7.14).

The forest in this novella, one of the briefest in the entire *Decameron* — briefer even than most of the tales in the day dedicated to brevity²⁰⁶ — becomes the site of pure narrative realization: the woman walks into the forest and in doing so walks into the story. As soon as she assumes a position that befits her characteristic suspicion, thereby becoming the character described in the first sentences, then the story unfolds like clockwork. Like the ecology described in the tale of the Roman lovers, the characters’ behavior is determined by their fixed characteristics — the wife’s unflagging “ritrosia” (*Dec.* 9.7.7), the husband’s sensitivity towards the dream, the wolf’s hunger for what may as well be a lamb — that set the conditions under which the narrative will unfold. All that is missing from this set of characteristics is narrative stimulus, which the forest instantly and believably provides the minute the woman and the wolf are placed in the same environment. The forest furthers the reader’s realization of the moral endorsed by the story, one concerning a women’s subservience and the credibility of omens, by ensuring a space that no crowds will pass through and a distance from medical care, thereby aggravating the injury and reinforcing its influence. As following chapter on the *Furioso* will demonstrate more fully, the careful invention of characters with traits that determine these characters’ action needs only to be complemented by a forest which will in turn determine their motion take in order to activate a full narrative system. But tales like those of Talano and the Roman lovers already show how the forest corresponds to the taut narrative economy of the novella, in which brevity

²⁰⁶ At fourteen sentences, the tale of Talano is shorter than novellas 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 of the sixth day.

demands a high ratio of possible narrative outcomes to the narrative cost of introducing or explaining narrative developments.

To maximize the communicative economy of the novella, Boccaccio realizes that one of the simplest ways to derive plot is to lead the characters to spaces where stories spontaneously and believably take place. The plot developments born of the forest, such as the charging knights or the wolf that emerges out of thin air, arise spontaneously and immediately and require little to no contextualization by the narrator for them to be believed by the reader. In short, anything can happen in the forest, or so readers are willing to accept. The French chivalric tradition had already exploited the great verisimilitude of the forest two centuries earlier and, as the next chapters detail, chivalric poets nearly two centuries after Boccaccio will explode the relationship between the infinite possibilities of the forest and the poem that derives its actions from these possibilities. Ariosto, Tasso and other Italian romance-writers would have no doubt looked back on French romances for inspiration but may have also found some in Boccaccio's tales, which predate the earliest surviving Italian chivalric narratives by about a decade,²⁰⁷ for in the *Decameron* a metaliterary equivalence is forged the forest and a setting ideal for sudden, believable action. Such action, so perfectly apt for the novella where space is limited and brevity prized, may have also served as a model for the episodic action of Boiardo and Ariosto's romances, where immediacy and surprise are essential elements. While this dissertation cannot fully catalogue the influence of Boccaccio on the Italian romance — such work has already been begun by Giuseppe Sangirardi²⁰⁸ — but it is worth noting that Boccaccio is the first of the Italian canonical poets

²⁰⁷ The first Tuscan narrative poem to discuss the Carolignian heroic cycle, *La Spagna*, is dated to 1350-1360.

²⁰⁸ See Giuseppe Sangirardi, "La presenza del *Decameron* nell'*Orlando furioso*", *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 10.1-2 (1992): 25-67.

to present the forest as a crucible containing the ecological possibilities to generate a narrative.

Of course, the forest is hardly the only crucible used by the *Decameron* to generate a narrative out of a system of characters. The same potential to delineate the characters' position and movement can be seen in most of the settings: crowded environments and destinations like piazzas, crossroads, and monasteries combine characters with pre-determined characteristics. What, then, distinguishes the metaliterary character of the forest from the potential metaliterary value of the other settings? The difference lies in either the degree or the allusivity of the self-referentiality. The allusions wrought through the forest environment in the novellas of Nastagio degli Onesti and Cimo, discussed shortly, will also demonstrate a high degree of dependence on the generative potential of the forest for its narrative outcomes, as with the tales of Talano and the Roman lovers. Tales such as these take wing particularly due to the influence of Fortuna over the forest, which lends immediate and believable plot material. A brief excursus is necessary to dwell on the link between Fortuna and the forest, not only as the relationship will influence these and other tales but because it reveals a long-standing cultural association at the heart of this dissertation.

In the *Decameron*, *Fortuna* is metonymy for the narrative force that engineers the story, on the macronarrative and micronarrative levels. The storytellers find themselves by chance in the same church, prompting one of them to remark that “potremmo dire la fortuna essere alla nostra andata favoreggiante” (*Dec.* 1.a.85). The phrasing of this first appearance of Fortuna highlights the aspect most relevant to this study, the potential of this supernatural agent to move characters into spaces and situation where the resulting interactions with the environment and other characters furthers the plot. And in the *Decameron* Fortuna is often

cited as the motor behind characters' disoriented motion, particularly in the second day (for example, tales 2.3 and 2.8) the theme of which centers on characters who "dal principio del mondo [...] sieno stati da diversi casi della fortuna menati". The seventh tale of the second day refers to *fortuna* nine times and twice more to the related concept of *caso*, a *befalling* from Fortuna's wheel, while the presence of these forces contribute to one of the most epic tales in the entire collection, the novella of Alatiel, the sultan's daughter kidnapped and swept across the Mediterranean world, a novella that opens with the narrator Panfilo's extended portrait of cruel Fortuna. It is no surprise to see Fortuna linked with naval travel specifically, as the personification was often represented as directly responsible for wind and other meteorological factors.

But as often happens with the *Decameron*, the tale is responding to others in the collection — in this case, the tale immediately preceding it, that of Madama Beritola. Like Alatiel, Beritola is swept across the sea as a repeated victim of "misera fortuna" (*Dec.* 2.6.28). What inaugurates Beritola's equally epic narrative — and what links this tale to the study of metaliterary forests — is the unexpected arrival of a goat into the forest where the protagonist sat stranded, lonely and desperate. The goat leads her "per lo bosco" (*Dec.* 2.6.15) to two other newborn goats, whom she will nurse as her own children in a relationship that invites her captors to nickname her Madama Cavriuola. It is worth noting that the guide to the site of the transformation of a "gentil donna divenuta fiera" (*Dec.* 2.6.17) is the seemingly random movement of a wild animal. A chief characteristic of the forests in the French chivalric romances preceding the *Decameron* — and more so the later Italian romances — is the power of animal locomotion to attract, repel, and combine human characters following purpose-driven itineraries.

As the next chapter will describe, the *Orlando furioso* makes extensive use of non-human protagonists — scared horses, runaway livestock, an enchanted hippogryph, all-knowing dieties — to direct the human protagonists away from their overwhelmingly direct itineraries. The haphazard motion of these animals is often attributed to Fortuna and randomness and often directs them through the forest. Beritola's goat appears here as an early example in the Italian literary tradition of the forest as a motor for the narrative, a motor that combines its animal components with humans' pre-determined conditions. Several stories in the *Decameron* derive significant narrative impetus from the random encounters typical of forest travel and in these the forest, like other unpredictable spaces in these same tales — like city centers, windy oceans and the campuses of monasteries — is routinely governed by Fortuna. The activities of Fortuna thus mark the forest as the ultimate crucible for narrative, where the strictures of verisimilitude are relaxed. Ariosto will exploit this overlap most fully but it is as ancient as the twentieth-century Chrétien de Troyes and is nowhere clearer in the *Decameron* than in the tale of the two Roman lovers, who in a rather neat sequence are *sventurati* by all the random misfortunes of which the forest is capable.

Other methods are used to mark the forests in the *Decameron* as not only generative of narrative potential but also instrumental in catalyzing characters' transformations, specifically ones that resemble pre-established literary archetypes. Personal transformations are perhaps the most succinct way of developing a plot and Boccaccio imagines several transformations in his *Decameron* as taking place in or being assisted by a forest environment. Though a more elaborate example than the many others described in the *Decameron* from Ser Ciappelletto onward, the tale of Madama Beritola is still based on a personal transformation. Another famous novella concerning a protagonist's transformation

is the first of the fifth day, the tale of Cimone. As has been discussed, the fifth day exhibits a high degree of literary self-awareness, from its theme that rewrites the theme of the previous day to the intertextual references in its individual novellas. Cimone deftly introduces the metaliterary character of the tales to follow, as his transformation from bumpkin to learned lover also describes the formation of a sensitive man of letters markedly similar to the stilnovist poets active in the generation before Boccaccio's birth. As with Beritola and the Roman lovers, the forest will again provide the means toward the continuation and resolution of their storylines and this provision will be similarly articulated through the force of Fortuna, further reinforcing the links between the forest, fortune and narrative fiction.

The first story of the fifth day opens in ancient Cyprus, where the rich king Aristippo is by "la fortuna fatto dolente" (*Dec.* 5.1.3) with the birth of a child that is physically monstrous but mentally deficient. His behaviors are "piú convenienti a bestia che a uomo" and so he acquires the name of Cimone, which Panfilo translates as "bestione" (*Dec.* 5.1.4). To spare himself constant embarrassment, Aristippo sends him to their villa in the country, where one day Cimone "entrò in un boschetto" (*Dec.* 5.1.6). There in the full spring foliage "s'avenne, sí come la sua fortuna il vi guidò" (*Dec.* 5.1.7), that Cimone entered a meadow ringed with mighty trees, a charming spring and a scantily clad young woman named Efigenia. He stares at her and "cominciò a distinguer le parti di lei, lodando i capelli, li quali d'oro estimava, la fronte, il naso e la bocca, la gola e le braccia e sommamente il petto, poco ancora rilevato" (*Dec.* 5.1.9). His examination leads him to conclude that "le divine cose essere di piú reverneze degne che le mondane" (*Dec.* 5.1.10). "Cimone, che vai tu a questa ora per questo bosco cercando?" (*Dec.* 5.1.11), she finally asks him, before leaving, "sempre di lui temendo" (5.1.15). He returns home, adopts new attire and manners, acquires expertise

in all the important skills and sciences, and “valorosissimo tra’ filosofanti divenne” (*Dec.* 5.1.18) — in short, love has “di montone fatto tornare uno uomo” (5.1.23), a notion confirmed by another character’s remark that “pugnenti sollectitudini d’armore da insensate animale [...] ti recarono a essere uomo” (5.1.56). Indeed, the same character concludes that he has no doubt that Cimone is “piú glorioso che alcuno idio” (*Dec.* 5.1.25).

This transformation takes nearly four years and the novella picks up as Efigenia is sailing to Rhodes to marry one Pasimunda. Cimone overtakes the crew, abducts Efigenia and heads to Crete to hide out. “Ma la fortuna, la quale assai lietamente l’acquisto della donna avea concesso a Cimone, non stabile, subitamente in tristo e amaro pianto mutò la inestimabile leitizia dello innamorato giovane” (*Dec.* 5.1.36): such is Panfilo’s characterization of the agency of Fortuna, expressed in syntax that rolls like angry waves from noun to dependent clause to appositive adjective to predicate. They encounter a storm which leads them back within bow’s flight of Efigenia’s ship and Cimone commands the crew to head “dove alla fortuna piacesse gli trasportasse” (*Dec.* 5.1.42), since any place else would be more advantageous. They reach shore but are recognized by the sailors from Rhodes and, before Cimone and crew can “fuggire in alcuna selva vicina” (*Dec.* 5.1.45), all but Efigenia are arrested. The narrator effects a twist with another paragraph that opens with a description of fortune: “La fortuna, quasi pentuta della subita iniura fatta a Cimone, nuovo accidente produsse per la sua salute” (*Dec.* 5.1.49). The governor of Rhodes who arrests them turns out to be in love with woman promised in marriage to another and decides to use Cimone’s prowess to kidnap both their beloveds. So they storm the palace, kill the original fiancés and each “lietamente con la sua visse lungamente contento nella sua terra” (*Dec.*

5.1.70), the first of the cliché endings common to the novellas of this day, already seen in the earlier tale of the Roman lovers.

Two aspects of this tale are worth emphasizing in order to understand the metaliterary value of the forest and other settings in it. The first is the pattern of allusions that constitute the literary character of Cimone's transformation by his infatuation with Efigenia, allusions that form a pastiche of the stilnovist poetic project. This stilnovist character is evident from the youths' first encounter, as Panfilo deftly describes Cimone's fragmenting gaze towards the woman's body with a catalogue of the individual parts to which he is attracted. Cimone's actions dramatize the blason, a poetic form used by the troubadours and their imitators in which praise is dedicated to various different parts of the beloved's body. While blasons recur in the compositions of the Sicilian school and the thirteenth-century continental lyricists — writers who aimed to reproduce but not elaborate their Provençal models — the form finds a metaphysical extension with the *dolce stil novo* that repurposed the troubadours' thematics of *fin'amor* to articulate narratives of refinement, spiritual elevation and transformation. For the *stilnovisti* the blason often culminated with the eyes, understood as the portals to the inner faculties of the soul, sensitive to external stimuli. Cimone's performance of the blason conforms to the stilnovist trajectory, culminating in their final eye contact and his utter infatuation. The transformation this character undergoes thus acquires a distinctly literary register through its restaging of the stilnovist situation, particularly that of the young Dante: the narrator's specification that just under four years elapse between Cimone's first encounter with Efigenia and his refinement recalls the motif of measured time from encounters with Beatrice that recurs throughout Dante's *Vita nova*, while passages of the blason allude heavily to this text. If Cimone appears reminiscent of the young Dante at

the beginning of this tale, it is perhaps an introduction to yet another Dantesque figure in this day of the *Decameron*, Nastagio degli Onesti, whose interaction with a forest will offer a meditation on the poem the elder Dante was only able to write after the conversion described at the close of the *Vita nova*.

But before turning to Nastagio, it will be useful to examine how the settings inhabited by Cimone, a deliberately literary character, also demonstrate literary awareness. While the novella traces a grand arc across various environments in the eastern Mediterranean — city, countryside, forest, sea — the thread linking them all is the locomotive force of Fortuna. As the summary of the novella above illustrates, Cimone's motion through the forest, at sea and on shore is always determined by Fortuna, even when he chooses to let it guide him, as when he commands the crew to retreat to wherever fortune may lead them. Sailing has long been associated with the winds of Fortuna and so too with narrative poetry, a journey away from the reader's here and now. As the previous novellas have shown and as the following chapter will detail, the forest is likewise associated with Fortuna and Chance, the motor behind so much seemingly random forest behavior, and also enjoys a longstanding association with narrative, seen as early as classical Greece.

So what comprises this last line of these triangular relationships mediated by the forest setting, namely, the link between Fortuna and poetry? Is poetry just that, the courting of fortune through entrance into spaces in its domain? The form of the *novella* takes its name from brief prose jokes that gave the news — the 'novel things', *novella*, in Latin — about stock characters like Hercules and Emperor Charlemagne. These little novels transported characters like Hercules into new or strange spaces like his marital home, where the dominant ecological factors — in this example, his indomitable wife — provide the means

towards an unexpected resolution.²⁰⁹ While these novellas give the ‘news’ about their characters, it may be more etymologically correct to say that they give the ‘stranges’ about them, transposing a character with familiar predetermined characteristics into a strange environment wherein these characteristics must struggle against the forces in the environment, like randomness.

The facile reconfiguration of the novella may well be the notion of narrative fiction that Boccaccio inherits — one that prefigures the clockwork narrative devised by the *Orlando furioso* — but it does not remain unmediated in *Decameron*. The *Decameron* is the supreme novel of opportunism, an ethics that is built into every level of the text. The macronarrative describes the youths’ need to flee plague-stricken Florence as an opportunity for not only survival but also diversion and *piacere*:

io giudicherei ottimamente fatto che noi, sí come noi siamo, sí come molti innanzi a noi hanno fatto e fanno, di questa terra uscissimo, e fuggendo come la morte i disonesti essempli degli altri onestamente a’ nostri luoghi in contado, de’ quali a ciascuna di noi è gran copia, ce ne andassimo a stare, e quivi quella festa, quella allegrezza, quello piacere che noi potessimo, senza trapassare in alcuno atto il segno della ragione, prendessimo (*Dec.* 1.a.65).

Likewise, nearly every tale in the collection describes a character who, with varying degrees of excess, exploits a situation with their ingenuity. Whole days are devoted to human ingenuity, exemplified by opportunistic words — the *pronta battuta*, the witty comeback that, by concluding the novella, reveals the genre’s origins in joke-telling — and the opportunistic trick or *beffa* that resolved the plot with physical slapstick. The author’s preface expects that his readers, explicitly targeted to as women closed up in their homes by their fathers and husbands, will exploit their detention at home as an occasion to educate themselves through entertainment.

²⁰⁹ The joke about Hercules coming home is novella 70 in the *Novellino*; see the edition of Giorgio Manganelli, *Il Novellino*, 2nd ed. (Milan: BUR, 1987).

The spirit of seizing the occasion appears on nearly every page of the *Decameron*, which may reveal something about the diegetic ecology common to all planes of narrative in this collection. As Machiavelli will describe nearly two centuries later, *occasio* is intimately related to Fortuna.²¹⁰ But Boccaccio will also exploit the relationship between *casus*, a fall from the wheel of Fortuna, and narrative in his later collection of exempla *De casibus*. Fortuna cannot be controlled but it can be exploited and few understood this better than the emerging class of merchants in early modern Italy, who exploited the challenges posed by Fortuna with the structures of insurance and price control.²¹¹ The *Decameron* is the textbook mercantile novel, so it should not surprise contemporary readers that the ethics of opportunism so related to that class is represented so thoroughly in this collection. Still worth nothing, however, is the relationship between the forest, Fortuna and this mercantile ethos.

The forest in the tale of Cimone demonstrates this opportunism quite positively. Far from the site of horrors that it was for Talano and the Roman lovers, the forest appears to Cimone as a *locus amoenus* where his deliberately literary transformation can be staged. Instead of wolves or brigands, Cimone is exposed to the equally potent body of Efigenia. But he is no passive object to the fortune that guides him to Efigenia and he makes the decision to follow her out of the city. His exploitation of the governor's love likewise allows him to capitalize on the fortunate juxtaposition of the other characters. While Ariosto's characters will react automatically in the forest, the forest for Boccaccio is the site of decisions: Cimone decides to follow Efigenia, Pietro decides to climb up a tree while Agnolella persuades herself to lodge with the shepherd couple, Talano's wife decides to hide behind a shrub. The

²¹⁰ See in particular chapter 6 of the *Principe* in the edition of Mario Martelli, *Il principe* (Rome: Salerno, 2006).

²¹¹ On the origin of mercantile inventions like insurance see Enrico Bensa, *Il contratto di assicurazione nel medio evo. Studi e ricerche* (Genoa: Tipografia marittima, 1884).

stories of such decisions constitute the literary field occupied by the *Decameron*, a collection of diegetic environments where the ingenuity of the human protagonist is given the opportunity to overcome the obstacles of fortune, a metonymic force for the narrative design itself — just as much as the forest is literature for Ariosto, who devises ever more elaborate ecologies where protagonists are moved by their characteristics instead of their opportunism. The last tale of the *Decameron* to be analyzed demonstrates many of the links between the forest and narrative discussed thus far: the literary character of the forest, the coterminality of the forest setting with the space of the story itself and the construction of a narrative ecology in which a character makes a decision, thereby satisfying the most basic element of the Boccaccian novella.

Nastagio as Boccaccian Miniature

The tale of Nastagio degli Onesti exhibits all these connections between the forest and the act of narration. But its metaliterary character is even more boldly perceptible on the level of plot. Here, a narrative of re-narrating references Boccaccio's re-telling of the *Commedia* both in its macronarrative — the *Umana Commedia* that, like its antecedent *Divina Commedia*, elevated contemporary reality to the level of literature — and in its micronarratives, with the infernal *contrappasso* described in this tale. As a tale set predominantly in the forest, a space that offers narrative material that will allow for the protagonist to make a decision and affect his own narrative, the tale of Nastagio degli Onesti exhibits all the narrative strategies discussed thus far by which Boccaccio approximates the forest setting and the spatiality and dynamics of his own text.

A brief summary of the novella may first be useful. In the Ravenna of the distant past, a young bourgeois man Nastagio degli Onesti inherits his father and uncle's fortune and falls

in love with a woman from the more noble Traversaro family. He attempts to win her over with “grandissime, belle e laudevoli” (*Dec.* 5.8.6) gestures but to no avail. Fearing his imminent bankruptcy, his friends advise him to “alcuno altro luogo per alquanto tempo andare a dimorare” (*Dec.* 5.8.9) and he eventually accedes. He packs as though “in Francia o in Ispagna o in alcuno altro luogo lontano andar volesse” (*Dec.* 5.8.10) but he in fact travels just three miles to Chiassi, where he sets himself up in a lavish lifestyle. On a bucolic spring day, “essendo un bellissimo tempo ed egli entrato in pensiero della sua crudel donna”, Nastagio wanders around the property and “piede innanzi piè sé medesimo trasportò pensando infino nella pigneta” (*Dec.* 5.8.13). Having gone “bene un mezzo miglio” into the woods, he “subitamente” hears a woman’s scream, which pierces his reverie such that Nastagio “maravigliossi nella pigneta veggendosi” (*Dec.* 5.8.14).

From a nearby “boschetto assai folto d’albuscelli e di pruni” (*Dec.* 5.8.15) springs a naked woman pursued by two enormous hounds. As they ferociously chase and bite the woman, a “cavalier bruno” (*Dec.* 5.8.16) arrives on a black horse, armed and threatening to kill her. Nastagio feels at the same time “maraviglia e spavento” (*Dec.* 5.8.17), then compassion for the woman, so he decides to intervene. Unarmed, he “ricorse a prendere un ramo d’albero in luogo di bastone” (*Dec.* 5.8.18) but the knight stops Nastagio, calling him by name. Nastagio protests the knight’s utter defiance of chivalry, to which the knight, giving his name as Guido degli Anastagi, replies that the gruesome spectacle reflects “le pene del Ninferno” (*Dec.* 5.8.22) as ordained by “la giustizia e la potenza di Dio” (5.8.23). In life, Guido explains, he had doggedly pursued this woman who had always refused his proposals causing him to commit suicide with his rapier so in death they are forced to restage their unrequited love in a literal key: he pursues his emotional tormenter “come mortal nemica,

non come amata donna” (*Dec.* 5.8.23), kills her with the instrument of his suicide and penetrates her “cuor duro e freddo, nel qual mai né amor né pietà poterono entrare” (5.8.24). Enduring a purgation that lasts “tanti anni [...] quanti mesi ella fu contro a me crudele”, they continually recreate this attack in all the “altri luoghi ne’ quali ella crudelmente contro a me pensò o operò”, reaching that pine forest “ogni venerdì in su questa ora” (*Dec.* 5.8.26). Stupefied, Nastagio steps aside to witness Guido “la divina giustizia mandare a esecuzione” (*Dec.* 5.8.27) but after some reflection “gli venne nella mente questa cosa dovergli molto poter valere” (5.8.32).

The worth lies in its exploitability by Nastagio, who tells his servants to invite “messer Paolo [de’] Traversari e la moglie e la figliuola e tutte le donne lor parenti, e altre chi piacerà” (*Dec.* 5.8.33) to dinner the following Friday. Though the targeted woman is reluctant, her whole family does show up and enjoys a lively banquet “sotto i pini” (*Dec.* 5.8.36), the beloved daughter seated with the best view of the impending spectacle. Having just finished the last course, the diners begin to hear the screaming and get agitated. When the undead Guido arrives, in hot pursuit of his beloved enemy, the dining women, some of whom were Guido’s own relatives, “tutte così miseramente piagnevano come se a se medesime quello avesser veduto fare” (*Dec.* 5.8.39). The young Traversaro woman is particularly shocked, “ricordandosi della crudeltà sempre da lei usata verso Nastagio” (*Dec.* 5.8.40) and, in the space of a few secretly sent messages, she is married to Nastagio who “con lei piú tempo lietamente visse” (5.8.44). The women of Ravenna, apparently “troppo” habitually independent, are similarly traumatized and become more receptive to the “piaceri degli uomini” (*Dec.* 5.8.44).

How might readers find literary and metaliterary value in the forest of this tale? The first of Boccaccio's strategies linking the forest to the craft of narrative noticeable here is that of having affected a coterminality between the space of the story and the forest environment. The novella of Nastagio is predominantly occupied with describing action taking place in the forest. Nastagio enters the woods in the eleventh of the forty-two sentences of narrative diegesis and exits in the fortieth, leaving only seven sentences to describe the arrival of the Traversaro family and the subsequent wedding arrangements. Boccaccio thus dedicates more than half of the prose of this novella to Nastagio's discovery of the phantasmagoria and his later manipulation of it. While the novella does reference the passage of time between Nastagio's forays into the woods, it pays more attention to reporting direct discourse, transmitted through messengers, rather than recounting action. Most time spent outside the woods is excluded from direction representation in the story, furthering the intuition that in this novella the forest is coterminous with the story itself.

Such is the case with the tales of the Roman lovers and Talano d'Imolese, where the narrative extends beyond the forest only as much as needed to contextualize the action within the woods. Such will also be the case with Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, in which fewer than ten stanzas elapse before the narrator follows Angelica's headlong flight into the woods. The twelfth-century French narrative poem, the *Yvain* of Chrétien de Troyes discussed in the following chapter, is an antecedent to the *Furioso* and *Decameron* alike for its potential to exploit the forest setting that it expresses through a bipartite narrative: the first half of the poem is spent with various characters at court recounting their adventures, while the second features the titular knight wandering through the woods in search of adventures and a means

to return home.²¹² While only mediated adventures are available at court, arousing Yvain's lust for adventure, the forest remains the space of pure potential for narrative action: the strangest marvels and wildest adventures need little narrative contextualization in a space so estranged from the verisimilitude of everyday, urban civilization. All a poet need do for a compelling story, Chrétien seems to suggest, is introduce a character into the woods and the stage is set for any number of poetic inventions. Away from the chatter of Yvain's court, the forest is the space of story, a conclusion available also from Boccaccio's *Nastagio*. While much of the action outside the forest is comprised of speech acts, the central action of the story involves *Nastagio*'s locomotion through the forest environment and response to its obstacles.

Nastagio's exploitation of the preternatural spectacle in the forest is another instance of decision-making that, as has been discussed, is fundamental to the structure and spirit of the Boccaccian narrative. Readers may appreciate the capitalist rhetoric in *Nastagio*'s idea that the supernatural spectacle "dovergli molto poter valere". Such a response exhibits the materialist ideology behind his mercantile attempts to buy his beloved's love with expensive gestures, gestures that are never named or described except in terms of their cost. As in other novellas, the forest provides *Nastagio* with a phenomenon that will stimulate him to make the decision upon which the rest of the narrative trajectory will hinge. The forest is also a site of decision-making for *Nastagio*'s unnamed beloved, who, during her very first visit to that forest, initiates a series of secretive messages to *Nastagio* that will negotiate their marriage. On this narratological level, the forest serves as the crucible for a character's opportunistic decisiveness, as it had in the tales of the Roman lovers, Cimone and Talano d'Imolese. When

²¹² The division occurs between verses 2480-2640; see Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*, tr. and ed. William Kibler (New York: Garland, 1985).

seen in light of the other tales that features characters exploiting the woods, Nastagio's pine forest offers the clearest insight into the forest's value as a metaliterary ecology: just lead a character into the woods — Boccaccio seems to suggest, like Chrétien before him — and the story will write itself. The inheritance and exploitation of an automatically active literary system are at the heart of not only this and other novellas of the *Decameron* but also in their generic forebear, the elaborate prose jokes that manipulated stock characters and settings the way standup comedians may profit from a man walking into a bar.

But with Nastagio a story does not just unfold logically from the interaction of an opportunistic protagonist and an environment with specific characteristics, as is the case with the Roman lovers and Talano. Nastagio in fact stumbles onto a readymade story: that is, his story not only writes itself but it is in fact already written and, as a narrative already, it is a fact that only requires republication by the objective-oriented protagonist to affect its transformation. Indeed, when the Traversaro women behold the spectacle, they are said to respond to the violence as though it were being done on themselves: “quante donne v’aveva [...] tutte così miseramente piagnevano come se a se medesime quello avesser veduto fare” (*Dec.* 5.8.39). None more than the unnamed beloved, though, who

ogni cosa distintamente veduta avea e udita e conosciuto che a sé piú che a
altra persona che vi fosse queste cose toccavano, ricordandosi della crudeltà
sempre da lei usata verso Nastagio; per che già le pareva fuggire dinanzi da
lui adirato e avere i mastini a’ fianchi (*Dec.* 5.8.40).

What are “queste cose” but a narrative, which engages with its audience by offering them a situation they will mentally simulate for themselves? The metaliterary character of the spectacle expresses Boccaccio's appreciation of the *incolunnità* of literature, also visible in Elissa's reference to the ten jousts hosted by the narrators' narrative and geographic “campo”. Readers can find metaliterary significance in the spectacle not only because the

characters interact with it in the same way they would a formally staged narrative, but also because it constitutes an unmistakable reference to Boccaccio's chief thematic model, Dante's *Commedia*.

If it is true that Boccaccio is the first to append the adjective *Divina* to the text which Dante simply called his *Commedia*, it would be in part because he sought to mark his own masterpiece as an *umana* alternative to the immediately canonical Florentine poem. Boccaccio's celebration of the human domain is made clear in the very first sentence of the proem, which begins "Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti [...]" (α.2), and is visible in the exclusively mundane perspective of the narrators, who give etiologies to dubious figures like Ser Cepperetto that in Dante would have always spoken only after being branded with a clear divine category. The derivative relationship of the *Decameron* to the *Commedia* is represented in the author's preface, where he imagines his narrative journey as a pleasant walk in the plains that obscure the view of a foreboding wooded peak, an unmistakable allusion to the mountain faced by the pilgrim at the opening of the *Commedia*.²¹³ Readers can see allusions to the *Commedia* on the structural level — each text offering a numerically structured sequence of micronarratives — and in the thematic ambition to raise the texture and behavior of quotidian life to the level of fine literature. Even the macronarrative plot traces a Dantesque peregrination from a specific place of destitution, plague-stricken Florence, to an unnamed elevation of earthly delights. But Boccaccio exhibits his program of rewriting the *Commedia* to the most literal level in the novella of Nastagio, which not only exploits the Dantesque trope of the *contrappasso* but also tells the tale of a character rewriting a Dantesque narrative, representing in miniature the entire literary project of the *Decameron*, a "libro [...] cognominato el Principe Galeotto" (α.1).

²¹³ On Boccaccio's relationship to Dante see, among others, Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante*, 9-68.

The references this novella makes to the figure and project of Dante are ubiquitous. The initial trajectory of Nastagio mirrors that of the young Dante in the *Vita nova*: scorned by his would-be lover, he must turn away from the world. As Branca demonstrates, the language describing the pine forest alludes to various passages of the first two canticles of the *Commedia*.²¹⁴ Nastagio's entrance into the woods and his subsequent discovery of the preternatural punishment are a clear crystallization of the pilgrim's experience in the *Inferno* and the knight's description of his near-eternal punishment is a clear variation on the motif of the interrogation of souls in Dante's afterlife. In order to elicit Guido's etiological narrative, Nastagio does exactly what the pilgrim had been urged to do in Dante's forest of suicides: break off a branch. Nastagio's decision to exploit the branch as a weapon, rather than merely behold the divine justice revealed by the injured tree, reflects the ethos of opportunistic decision-making that distinguishes Boccaccio's narrative from Dante's completely passive pilgrimage.

The preternatural spectacle is, furthermore, an unmistakable variation on the Dantesque *contrappasso*, the ingenious punishment represented in every circle of the *Inferno* that in fact executes precise literalizations of linguistic and situational expressions, as in the case of the lovers Paolo and Francesca being literally buffeted by their passions or those stingy with their precious metals literally clutching stones. The *contrappasso* Nastagio finds is just as literal: the unrequited love between the young woman and the knight is recast as literal enmity, heartache as literal cardiac injury, the length of their suffering as the period of their penance. As been discussed, the *contrappasso* Nastagio discovers is a text in which its readers will imagine themselves but this simulacrum potential can now be understood as

²¹⁴ Branca's edition (673-679) suggests allusions to *Inf.* 1.4, *Inf.* 3.22, *Inf.* 22.19-20, *Inf.* 23.24, *Inf.* 28.31, *Purg.* 6.28 and *Purg.* 28.2-54.

deriving from its literalization of the Traversaro family's own behavior. More than just a deft symbol for the audience's risks in the afterlife, the *contrappasso* is a deliberately Dantesque construction that Nastagio restages in much the same way Boccaccio restages Dante's text.

Like Boccaccio beholding Dante's *Commedia*, Nastagio discovers an existing text and republishes it for his own aims. The spectacle becomes for Nastagio a platform for advocating a sociopolitical program that urges women to exploit their status as sexual goods and thereby save themselves from lasting damnation. Like Nastagio, Boccaccio finds in Dante's text a model that can be recontextualized to promote a philosophy of opportunism. Just as the figures who most clearly represent moral values in Dante are those characters like Francesca da Rimini and Piccarda who lack the pre-existing literary value to temper their exemplarity of particular values, so too do the majority of *Decameron's* characters invented or originally elevated as literary characters by Boccaccio demonstrate most clearly the virtue of opportunism and ingenuity that predominates his narrative.

The tale of Nastagio thus exhibits the entire range of strategies by which the forest is made to represent the text of the *Decameron*. It first aligns its own narratological boundaries, the contours of the story itself, with the space of the forest. The same coterminality is seen in the tales of the Roman lovers and of Talano d'Imolese, micronarratives that suggest what the *Furioso* in its entirety will also propose, namely, that the forest is the space of the story. Also similar to the *Furioso's* narrative is the *Decameron's* interest in the perpetuation of narrative systems facilitated by the geological and biological limitations built into the forest environment. The narrative trajectories of the Roman lovers, Madama Beritola and Cimone are all shaped by the animals and rhythms of the forest, as is Nastagio's by the *contrappasso*, to which Boccaccio is also careful to attribute a precise duration. But unlike the *Furioso's*

overwhelmingly automatic narrative ecology, the *Decameron* crafts environments in which characters can make decisions, the demonstrations of personal ingenuity on which their narrative hinges. The decision Nastagio makes is to publicize the story that the forest offers him and, in this most literal exponent of the intuition that the forest generates stories, the story is an allusion to the same model text that inspired the *Decameron* as a whole. On this fifth day of storytelling, a day rife with metaliterary allusions, the tale of Nastagio offers perhaps the clearest micronarrative reflection of Boccaccio's conceit of the macronarrative. Through allusions, manipulations and the delineation of narratological boundaries, Boccaccio underlines in this tale more clearly than in all the others that the forest can very ably stand for the text itself.



Boccaccio is hardly the first to uncover the metaphoric connection between the forest and literary texts. His exploitations of the narrative system comprised by the forest setting, the opportunism of characters and explicit thematic ambitions are byproducts of his meditation on various literary traditions, among them chivalric literature, vernacular comic prose and the pristine example of literary worldmaking bequeathed by Dante, his literary idol. But Boccaccio distinguishes himself from his predecessors by his awareness of the wide yet limited space he occupies in Italian literature. At several crucial moment of self-identification in the *Decameron* — from explicit moments like the subtitle and the proem to implicit references like the novella of Nastagio degli Onesti — the collection presents itself as a lesser alternative to the imposing majesty of the *Commedia*. Boccaccio's understanding of his relationship to literary history may well have informed the preoccupation with spatial measurement evident throughout the *Decameron*, an enormous, numerically complex novel that still delivers a satisfying ending every few pages, a novel that imagines itself as a field

just large enough for ten jousts or, in the author's conclusion, a garden that contains healthy and rough patches. But if the *Decameron* imagines itself as a garden, it must be a garden that abuts a forest, which ensures the narrative variety so essential to the dynamic pattern of the *Decameron*'s storytelling that on the day free of thematic constraints the narrators literally frolic in it.

Given its effectiveness in designing literary worlds in various micronarratives in the *Decameron*, the forest proves an extremely apt component in the descriptions the macronarrative offers of itself: its limited space, the wealth of narrative possibilities it engenders and the cast of predictable human and animal characters it houses produce a crucible in which the impulses of fortune, opportunism, ingenuity and flight, fundamental concepts to the merchant-class readers of the *Decameron*, can be examined in near isolation. As exemplary narrative environments, the forests of the *Decameron* reveal the collection's interest in the complex, multilateral operation of storytelling and paves the way for a storyteller interested in further complicating the narrative operation to push the potential of the forest to its extremes. That storyteller, as the next chapter details, is Ariosto: if in tales like that of the Roman lovers Boccaccio exploits the forest to reach a narrative end, Ariosto explodes it, using it to catalyze an intricate tapestry of characters, conditions and invisible forces that actively impede the resolution of the narrative. With the measured tension of the *Decameron* and the centrifugal chaos of the *Furioso*, it is evident that, as each work identifies with the forest, each identification reveals well-established aspects of the works through new means, the environmental subset of their metaliterary expression.

Chapter 3: The *Furioso* as Forest

“this poem intentionally left blank”
Charles Bernstein, *This Poem Intentionally Left Blank*²¹⁵



Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* is above all a poem of abundance, a chivalric narrative brimming over with innumerable plotlines, characters and settings from every corner of the early modern European imaginary, and its characteristic abundance is admitted by the many metaphorical descriptions the poem offers of itself. The more celebrated of these descriptions include the narrator's comparison between the poem and a tapestry²¹⁶ and between the poet and a waylaid sailor (*OF* 46.1-19). Twice (in *OF* 12.19-22 and 13.50-79 and, later, in 22.14-23) readers encounter an enchanted castle controlled by the ambiguously moral mage Atlante and can easily read its hypnotized prisoners, chasing after mirages of their greatest desires, as miniatures for the generally predictable protagonists in the poem. Equally self-descriptive are the narrator's repeated references to the movement of his narrative expression, seen in a transition between episodes in the first canto: chasing after Baiardo, his runaway horse, “Segue Rinaldo, e d'ira si distrugge: / ma seguitiamo Angelica che fugge” (*OF* 1.32).

As this chapter will detail below, these self-descriptions all return the same essentialization of the *Furioso* as a poem produced by a plurality of forces disrupting a single linear narrative operation: the plurality of narrative agents is seen in each self-representation, from the need to weave the narrative according to the predetermined design of the tapestry to the helplessness of the sailor-poet kept at sea by his deities, from stasis of Atlante's castle

²¹⁵ See Charles Bernstein, *With Strings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 121. The poem is given in lowercase on the page but capitalized in the table of contents; see ix.

²¹⁶ The tapestry appears in *OF* 2.3, 13.81 and 22.3. For the Ovidian and Dantesque genealogy of the tapestry, see Looney, *Compromising the Classics*, 91-109. Maria Cristina Cabani also notes the influence of the tapestry in Petrarca's *RVF* 40.1-2; see *Fra omaggio e parodia: Petrarca e petrarchismo nel «Furioso»* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1990), 92.

that must be shattered for the narrative to progress to the narrator's apparent following of his own characters. The same dynamic marks the relationship between nearly every character and the forest setting where the *Furioso* stitches together many of its episodes, which often spring from random interruptions to planned journeys thwarted in the woods. This similarity in dynamic, one of disrupted clockwork, coalesces with other aspects of the ubiquitous forest setting that together invite an inquiry into the potential metaliterary functionality of the forest, for not only do characters in the forest consistently find their trajectories misdirected but this very misdirection often aligns with significant narrative transitions. The misdirection, furthermore, is often caused by non-human agents like horses or by invisible forces like Chance which constitute a rich diegetic system of actors that in turn represent the vitality of the structures active in the narrative operation itself. Though never explicitly approved by a poem that otherwise repeatedly and variously describes itself, the forest is an apt and, as proposed here, a heavily implied metaphor for the *Furioso* that profits so greatly from it. The majority of this chapter serves to substantiate this intuition through analysis of the construction of the forest, specifically the agency enjoyed there by forces of randomness, connecting aspects of the setting to the characteristics of the chivalric narrative poem as Ariosto had inherited and fashioned it.

To fully investigate the *Furioso*'s potential self-identification with the forest and the ecological character such an identification conveys, this study will first detail what would today be understood as the ecological aspects of his textual world, uncovered in the the cooperation of human, animal, environmental and invisible agencies described in the narrative. The perennial link between one such force, *caso*, and forest travel betrays the influence of ancient and early modern cosmologies on Ariosto's narrative. The obviousness

with which narrative developments are ascribed to the force of *caso* will lead to the second part of this study, concerning the methods Ariosto uses to express this comparison between his poem and its forest setting. The metaphor of the forest for the poem is substantiated by Ariosto's tendency to overlap the activity of narrating with a character's interaction with the forest. This tendency is manifested in three ways: the delineation of episodes with motion to, from and within the forest, the exploitation of the forest topography and animal navigation for narrative effect, and the ultimate alignment, in the central episode, of the forest with the very verses of the poem. Seen as a whole, the pattern of links between the *Furioso* and its forests emblemizes what the poem's overt metaliterary references communicate, the subject of the last section of this study: the poet's engagement with a literary system rather than the prescription of a singular narrative, the interest in exploring a world rather than the adherence to a singular journey through that world. The delight with which Ariosto dwells in the woods of the *Furioso* — in contrast to the gruesomeness with which he cuts down the forest in the *Cinque canti*, a poem intended to depict the death of Orlando and the closure of the *Furioso*'s central storyline — will be shown to mark his metaliterary identification with the forest as not only the most enthusiastic of the poets under consideration in this dissertation but also the poet most attuned to the complexity of the forest ecosystem and its potential for narrative generation. The reading offers the clearest example in the four studies in this dissertation of a forest that represents not only a phase or a fraction of the work, as with the three others, but the work in its entirety, offering a metaphor that reveals the scale, complexity and energy of the poem as a whole.

An Ecology in Motion

A poem that simply cannot be contained, the *Orlando furioso* has been read and reread, sung, imitated, illustrated, painted, staged and, perhaps most ingeniously, honored with a neo-Western anthology film, Jim Jarmusch's 1989 *Mystery Train*. Literary critics from Galileo to Borges have made similar efforts to understand the *Furioso* through metaphor. But as a poem so abundant in original and added descriptions, does the *Orlando furioso* need another metaphor, however well supported by reasonable readings of the text? Contemporary criticism of the poem could certainly profit from it, for the many descriptions of the poem lack the characterization seen in the overarching similarity between the narrative poem and the forest setting proposed in this chapter, the characterization of the poem as, in post-nineteenth-century parlance, an ecology,²¹⁷ an intricate and evolving system of components that work actively and often adversely to exert force on parties introduced to it. The critical identification of ecological structures outside the strictly terrestrial domain, an approach known as ecocriticism,²¹⁸ can refine what readers of the *Furioso*, chief among them Italo Calvino, have intimated about the poem's errant, inconvenient movement and, moreover, the amount of narrative attention dedicated to such movement.

While it is productive to read the poem as outmoded literature sardonically retold to a corrupt courtly audience, the historicizing position that has become standard, it can be just as valuable to consider the intense meditation on the narrative process required of Ariosto to yield such a skilled and thorough caricature. From a narratological standpoint, the poem can be seen as a wry tribute to all the agents involved in fashioning and perpetuating literary

²¹⁷ Ernst Haeckel coined the term "Oecologie" in his 1866 *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie* (Berlin: Reimer), 2:286.

²¹⁸ For an early history of such approaches see Glotfelty, "Introduction".

worlds working at odds with the author: the ecological factors of the diegetic world created — the biology and sociology of the human and animal characters, inanimate forces like randomness and magic and, most relevant to this study, the topography and meteorology — together with the structural factors of narrative communication, like etiologies, the length of episodes and cantos and the foretold resolution of major plotlines. In this model of composition, the narrator faces the same thwarted trajectory as his characters, confirming the impulse behind the metaphor of the poet as a sailor lost at sea to be active in less overtly self-referential areas of the poem, namely, its setting.

Before investigating the metaphors with which the *Furioso* expresses its ecological character, it will first be helpful to link the notion of a literary ecology to established critical positions on the construction of Ariosto's poem. The notion of an ecology posits relatively autonomous systems of living and non-living elements in interaction with each other and their environments, subject to influences from every angle, from the topography and weather to complicated social structures like the chivalric code. The *Furioso* as a material object is the result of a complicated ecology involving the multiple plant, animal and human participants in the early modern print industry that in turn nurtures critics, students, editors, publishers, librarians and the various political and ethical institutions that govern their interaction with the text.²¹⁹ But there is another ecology more relevant to the poem's understanding of its narrative composition: the diegetic imagination of the poem that is mostly closed off from the material ecology of early modern Italy, save for obligatory references to Ariosto's patrons in the court of Ferrara.

²¹⁹ On the complexity of the print industry in early modern Italy see Brian Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

To refer to the world of the *Furioso* — its extensive population of humans, sorcerers, horses, imaginary animals both monstrous and marvelous centered in Europe and the Middle East but vast enough to include the moon, the underworld and even the New World — was unremarkable even in the earliest commentaries on the poem, the poet’s great-nephew Orazio Ariosto remarking that the poem offered “più specchi della vita humana”.²²⁰ The concept of artistic worldmaking, a practice famously treated by Nelson Goodman in the mid 1970s,²²¹ is evident in various texts from the sixteenth century, among them Francesco Alunno’s 1548 dictionary *La fabrica del mondo* and the *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* Torquato Tasso would have begun by 1566, which recommends that a narrative poem be seen as “quasi [...] un picciolo mondo”.²²² Giuseppe Mazzotta, who did much to apply the discourse of worldmaking to the study of early modern Italian literature, recognizes the cosmopoetic practice of the *Furioso*.²²³

Other twentieth-century critics of the *Furioso* have spoken of the “universe” of the poem.²²⁴ Among them, Italo Calvino in his radio commentary on the *Furioso* describes its “universo” with several references to the agency of the diegetic system presented there: “potremmo ricorrere all’immagine d’un campo di forze, che continuamente genera al suo interno altri campi di forze. Il movimento è sempre centrifugo”.²²⁵ The poem demonstrates

²²⁰ See his *Difese dell’Orlando furioso dell’Ariosto*, O¹v, in Giovan Battista Licino, ed., *Apologia del Sig. Torquato Tasso in difesa della sua Gierusalemme liberata. Con alcune altre Opere, parte in accuse, parte in difesa dell’Orlando furioso dell’Ariosto, della Gierusalemme istessa, e dell’Amadigi del Tasso padre* (Ferrara: Cagnacini, 1585), N³v-P²v.

²²¹ See especially section 4 of his 1975 essay “Words, Works, Worlds”, in *Ways of Worldmaking*, 7-17.

²²² See *Arte poetica 2* in Poma, ed., 36.

²²³ See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 25-51.

²²⁴ See Quint, “The Figure of Atlante”, 78; see also Corrado Bologna, *La macchina del «Furioso». Letture dell’«Orlando» e delle «Satire»* (Milan: Einaudi, 1998), 51.

²²⁵ The commentary was broadcast on 5 January 1975 and published as “La struttura del «Furioso»” in *Terzoprogramma* 2-3 (1974): 51-58, technically the previous year’s volume. See “La struttura del «Furioso»”, 53.

una concezione del tempo e dello spazio che rinnega la chiusa configurazione del cosmo tolemaico, e s'apre illimitata verso il passato e il futuro, così come verso una incalcolabile pluralità di mondi.²²⁶

Calvino's assertion that the poetic system is capable of autogeneration according to an infinity of possibilities ascribes to the poem the chief characteristic of ecosystems, resilience and sensitivity towards internal and external influences.

Discussing Ariosto's narrative practice, which Corrado Bologna will later argue is defined by the "flusso inesauribile del tempo",²²⁷ Calvino writes that "si direbbe che il poeta, cominciando la sua narrazione, non conosca ancora il piano dell'intreccio che in seguito lo guiderà con puntuale premeditazione",²²⁸ a lack of authorial predetermination "che potremmo definire — con un termine pregno di significati — il movimento *errante* della poesia d'Ariosto".²²⁹ This movement has a particular shape:

Fin dall'inizio il *Furioso* si annuncia come il poema del movimento, o meglio, annuncia il particolare tipo di movimento che lo percorrerà da cima a fondo, movimento a linee spezzate, a zig zag. Potremmo tracciare il disegno generale del poema seguendo il continuo intersecarsi e divergere di queste linee su una mappa d'Europa e d'Africa, ma già basterebbe a definirlo il primo canto in cui tre cavalieri inseguono Angelica che fugge per il bosco, in una sarabanda tutta smarrimenti, fortuiti incontri, disguidi, cambiamenti di programma.²³⁰

Indeed, as the following reading of the first and central scenes of the poem, will show, this haphazard motion — traced by accidental encounters, frightened horses, paths winding in the moonlight — is the deliberate movement of the poem. Unlike the hyperaccurate Tasso, Ariosto constructs settings to suit his narrative objectives and delights in frustrating the trajectories to arrive at them. The forest provides both the necessary space and dynamic, for it can not only house action but also, in the central scene of Orlando's insanity, generate it.

²²⁶ Calvino, "La struttura del «Furioso»", 54.

²²⁷ *La macchina del «Furioso»*, 50.

²²⁸ "La struttura del «Furioso»", 54.

²²⁹ "La struttura del «Furioso»", 54, italics original.

²³⁰ Calvino, "La struttura del «Furioso»", 54, italics original.

Corrado Bologna elaborates Calvino's thoughts on the vitality of the subject matter by proposing

l'immagine del *Furioso* come organismo vivente e insieme «macchina testuale», come grande contenitore-rielaboratore universale di parole idee immagini forme disegni d'altri testi, e sintetizzatore-trasformatore dell'intera tradizione epico-romanzesca medievale e quattrocentesca; ma anche come telaio su cui vengono ordite «varie fila» e «varie tela», in una prova di scrittura insieme *fantastica e mediana* che apre la porta [...] a [...] Gadda (che [...] parlando del «caos del romanzo» e della necessità d'una costruzione digressiva della «trama», si richiamerà proprio all'Ariosto).²³¹

Extending Calvino and Bologna's vision of a living, self-generating poem, the narrative of which is shaped by the vitality of many actors within and without the poem, the present study aims to evaluate the *Furioso* not only as an ecology but also as a poem that advertises its own ecological character. Considering the poem from above, much of the activity of the *Furioso* is derived from the encounters and interactions of its characters, a narrative system from which Calvino will elaborate his 1973 novel *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, where the biologically and socially determined characters of the *Furioso* have become so automatic they can be faithfully reduced to personages in a set of tarot cards. For Calvino and Ariosto alike, the story is a product of a finite combinatorial system, like language itself. Calvino recognizes in the matrix he reveals towards the end of the Orlando cycle of tales in his *Castello dei destini incrociati* (**figure 3**) that what makes the *Furioso* so interesting is not its cast of two-dimensional characters, unsurprising at almost every instance once understood in terms of their derivation from established literary models, but the environment that will determine how and where their interactions will come about.²³²

²³¹ *La macchina del «Furioso»*, x, italics original.

²³² One half of the collection now recognized as *Castello dei destini incrociati* was first published in a limited-edition anthology, *Tarocchi. Il mazzo visconteo di Bergamo e New York* (Parma: Ricci, 1969), that also included Sergio Samek Ludovici's sixty-three hand-painted reproductions of tarot cards executed by the miniaturist Bonifacio Bembo around 1445. On Bembo's career see Franco Mazzini, "Bembo, Bonifacio", in Alberto Ghisalberti, ed., *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-), 8:109-111. The illustration reproduced here is from the 1973 edition, which joins a collection entitled *Il castello dei*

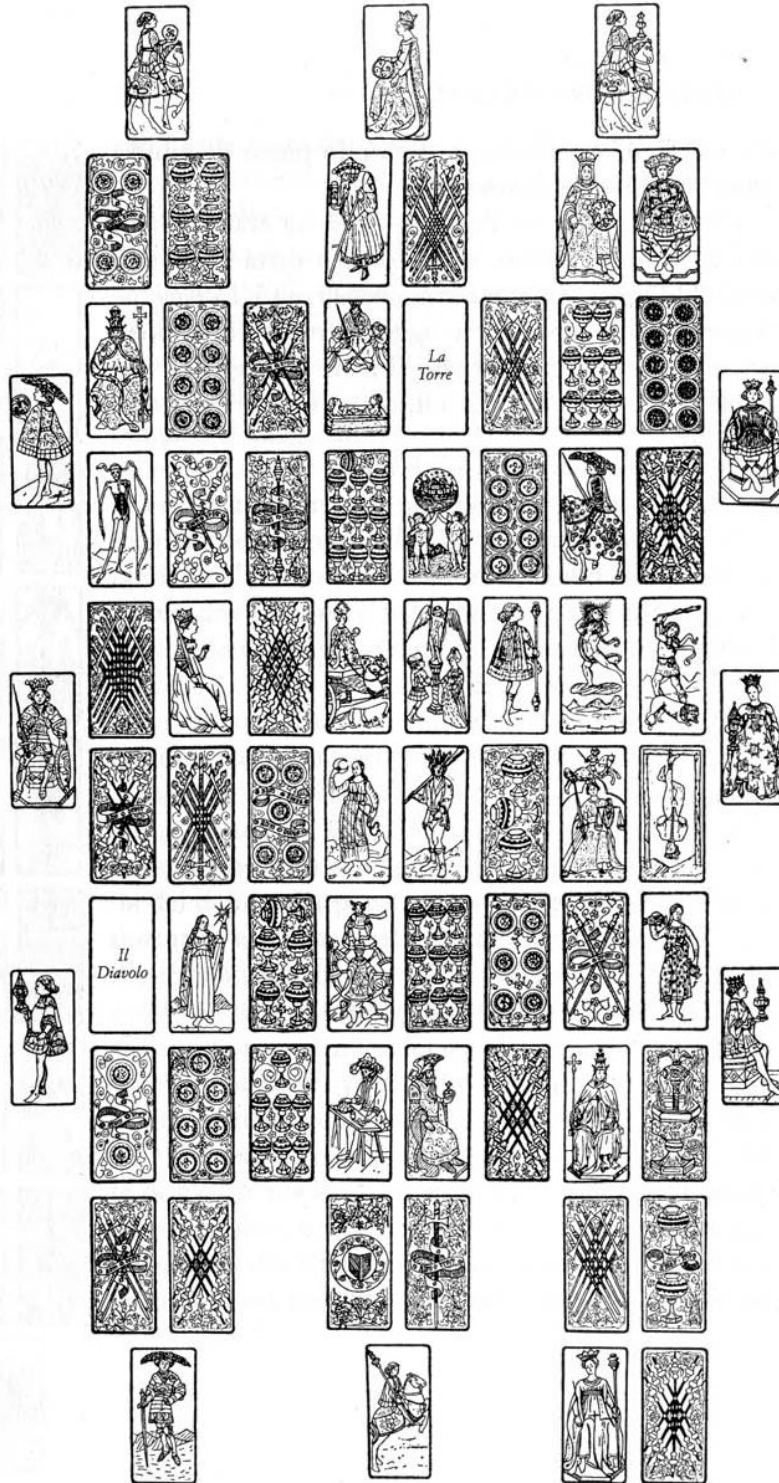


Figure 3: Tarot matrix from Calvino's *Castello dei destini incrociati*

destini incrociati with another entitled *La taverna dei destini incrociati*; see Italo Calvino, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (Turin: Einaudi), 40.

A contemporary American poem may best illustrate the notion of a literary ecology that the following sections argue the *Furioso* exemplifies and, indeed, advertises through its forests. In five italicized words with no reference to plants or animals, Charles Bernstein uncovers a functional literary ecosystem only active with the passive participation of the reader:

this poem intentionally left blank[.]

Like the *Furioso*, Bernstein's invention profits from discovering a system of referentiality in an interstitial patch mandated by the genre, be it the blank page of legal documents or the episodic transition negotiated by forest travel. Like the *Furioso*, this verse succeeds only by not succeeding and readers can appreciate the dense artistry of its referentiality, recontextualization and metaliterary awareness only by recognizing their own passivity in the system that generates that system. The theoretical "poem" referenced by Bernstein's inconveniently authoritative non-poem is presented as elusive as the fleeing princess Angelica or the many runaway horses populating Ariosto's literary ecology, one that operates seemingly independently and demonstrates little regard for prioritizing its readers' expectations. The reader is displaced in the ecology of the *Furioso*, as are the protagonists and the author, as the last two sections of this chapter will detail.

But to first appreciate how the *Furioso* can its forests to represent itself as a diegetic ecology, a better understanding is needed of the character of its unique ecology. Helpfully, the first canto to the poem offers a programmatic introduction to not only the types of episodes that will make up much the poem but also the ways in which the narrative activity aligns — or misaligns — with the directional energies of the protagonists. While the *Furioso* never properly begins — Calvino writes of the *in medias res* continuation of Matteo Maria Boiardo's incomplete *Innamoramento d'Orlando* that the "*Orlando furioso è un poema che*

si rifiuta di cominciare”²³³ — it does present an opening and must reconstruct, however tersely, the “universo” it inherited from that poem.²³⁴ Even with brevity, though, the *Furioso* carefully lays out its ecology and the dynamics that determine its perpetuation:

Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori,
le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto
che furo al tempo che passaro i Mori
d'Africa il mare, e in Francia nocquer tanto [...] (OF 1.1).

The subjects of the poem appear in a paratactic succession of nouns, their grammatical position not clarified until the subject and verb appear at the end of the second verse. Spoken into the void as in a creation poem, these seemingly deattached ideas populate the diegetic world with its most prominent inhabitants: humans, who by and large act according to a set of automatic, almost animalistic behavioral patterns. But already the mention of a plurality of “donne” and “cavallier” demonstrates a vast, multispecies ecology, from the *donne* (from the Latin *dominare*, ‘to rule’), who presumably have attendants over which they rule in an hierarchically structured society, to that the *cavallieri* (from *cavallo*, ‘horse’) whose horses and equipment are the result of professional horse breeding, smithwork and military education.

This first verse continues by elaborating on the major dynamics within its diegetic population: namely, war and love, each implying a number of institutions and practices that carry their own momentum. The second verse specifies the behavioral codes that arise out of this momentum: courtly obligations, such as deference and duty, and military glory, which in the *Furioso* often seeps out beyond the battlefield to motivate individual characters’ quests for equipment and revenge. Together the dynamics that emerge from sexual attraction, chivalry and courtly social structure form a network will determine the behavior of the

²³³ “La struttura del «Furioso»”, 51. See also Bologna, *La macchina del «Furioso»*, 53-60.

²³⁴ Quint, “The Figure of Atlante”, 78.

protagonists, often expressed with naturalist metaphors of animal behavior. The rest of the stanza specifies the time and place where this ecology will play out, the advance of the Umayyads — or Saracens, in Ariosto's parlance — into the European continent. In the space of nine stanzas, several of the more salient plotlines from the *Innamoramento* are conjured, establishing further determinants for the characters' behavior. Just introduce these characters and conditions into the forest and the story, as the saying goes, writes itself. Indeed, this everyday expression reveals a profound understanding of narrative ecosystems which, when constructed from a sufficiently propitious combination of elements, do contribute to the act of writing themselves into existence. Unfolding from a collection of characters and characteristics, the first stanza thus promotes the image of the *Furioso* articulated by Calvino, the forcefield perpetuating the narrative through reactions resulting from its vital components.

Over the next few stanzas, the narrator describes the duel for Angelica's hand, an expedient to introduce the relevant socio-political relationships inherited from the *Innamoramento*, as will be discussed below, but even before her entrance into the woods, that perfect crucible for the ecological dynamics of the poem, he will present a second characteristic element of the *Furioso*'s ecology: the thwarting force of *caso*. Carlo Magno, the Holy Roman Emperor, promises Angelica to the warrior that killed the most enemy soldiers in their most recent clash, but "Contrari ai voti poi furo i successi" (*OF* 1.9) and the Franks' retreat provide Angelica the chance to flee. In the last line of this bird's-eye, broad-swath narrative résumé, Angelica, shaking her head at the overlapping networks of love and war that stymie the Franks, "presaga che quel giorno esser rubella / dovea Fortuna alla cristiana fede" (*OF* 1.10). However jocular the remark of a non-Christian remarking

truthfully on Christian affairs, Angelica's observation introduces the role of Fortuna in the poem's diegetic ecology. Fortuna was a ubiquitous presence in the early modern cosmology, represented with large wheel on which she overturns and uplifts people regardless of their station, while the related figure of Occasio was often personified as a woman with a long forelock, apt for seizing.²³⁵ Her arbitrary favors and unpredictable arrival align her with Fortuna, often metonymized as the related force *caso* (*casus* in Latin, from *cadere*, 'to fall'), the falling from a position on her spinning wheel.

Occasio, Fortuna and *caso* are quite different in the connotations they held in contemporaneous discourse, namely due to the ability to seize *occasione* compared with the impotence before pure *caso*. Their functions within the diegetic ecology, though, are quite similar: each is repeatedly named as a root cause of the protagonists' directions and redirections without regard to — and at times in direct opposition to — the behavior determined by the characters' allegiances or libido. That is, in order for the story to elapse, Fortuna and *caso* must be actively rebellious — *esser rubella dovea Fortuna* — to the linear itineraries of the Christian protagonists. Indeed, the simplistic and often immediate reactions of the protagonists of the *Furioso* should demonstrate no distaste on the part of Ariosto for psychological literature²³⁶ but instead an interest in the ecology of narrative. The characters of the *Furioso* almost always behave as they do in Atlante's castle, as automatons unswervingly chasing their singular desire, only in the enchanted prison they are being preserved from the risks of participating in a narrative, which implies the foretold death of

²³⁵ On the literary representations of Fortuna see Howard Rollin Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna, in Roman Literature and in the Transitional Period", *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 3 (1921-1922): 125-177; and Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna*, 35-87. See also Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*, 2nd. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 138-143.

²³⁶ Peter DeSa Wiggins recognizes the limitations of a purely psychological investigation of Ariosto's characters in his *Figures in Ariosto's Tapestry: Character and Design in the Orlando Furioso* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1-16.

Ruggiero. It is only in an ecology outside the complete control of the author that the protagonists can be distracted from their itineraries enough for a compelling narrative to be born.

And readers do see a number of compelling episodes born from the redirecting force of purely random developments, often expressed with a verb of haphazard motion like “giungere”, “sopraggiungere” or “sopravvenire”. Readers may consider Orlando’s early encounter with Agramante and his company:

Orlando a caso ad incontrar si venne
(come io v’ho detto) in questa compagnia,
cercando pur colei, come egli era uso,
che nel carcer d’Amor lo tenea chiuso (*OF* 12.73).

Midway through the poem, Fiordiligi encounters Isabella and Zerbino at random (“a caso”)

but also interprets Orlando’s riderless horse as an unfortunate befalling (“caso”):

Come io vi dico, sopraggiunta a caso
a quei duo amanti Fiordiligi bella,
conobbe l’arme, e Brigliador rimaso
senza il patrone e col freno alla sella.
Vide con gli occhi il miserabil caso,
e n’ebbe per udita anco novella;
che similmente il pastorel narrolle
aver veduto Orlando correr folle (*OF* 24.56).

Orlando semiconsciously encounters his nemesis Rodomonte:

A caso venne il furioso conte
a capitar su questa gran riviera,
dove, come io vi dico, Rodomonte
fare in fretta facea, né finito era
la torre né il sepolcro, e a pena il ponte:
e di tutte arme, fuor che di visiera,
a quell’ora il pagan si trovò in punto,
ch’Orlando al fiume e al ponte è sopraggiunto (*OF* 29.40).

Angelica safely passes by the enraged Orlando, in her only appearance in the poem after having married Medoro:

Stando così, gli venne a caso sopra
Angelica la bella e il suo marito,
[...].

A men d'un braccio ella gli giunse appresso,
perché non s'era accorta ancora d'esso (*OF* 29.58).

Even Marfisa's effective racial identity had been attributed to her as the result of a random kidnapping, as the undead voice of Atlante recounts:

Un giorno che d'andar per la contrada
e da la stanza allontanar m'occorse,
vi sopravvenne a caso una masnada
d'Arabi (e ricordarvene de' forse),
che te, Marfisa, tolser ne la strada (*OF* 36.63).

Fortuna also leads Angelica to Atlante's castle (*OF* 12.25) and the treacherous Pinabello arrives "per ventura" just as Bradamante was wondering how to transport Astolfo's horse (23.18).

But the disruptive force of Fortuna in fact works both with and without human input. While in the second phase of her flight, first from the duel and now from the potential sexual predation of Rinaldo and Ferrau, Angelica disappears past a forked road. Up to this point in the first canto, all motion had been determined by automatic behavioral determinants: Angelica's fear for her safety as well as her aversion to Rinaldo, determined by enchanted waters in the *Innamoramento*,²³⁷ in addition to the knight's overriding lust and the logicity of all three traveling along established forest paths. But now, with no other factors to determine the propulsion of the narrative, the characters actively recur to Fortuna, in the guise of their respective divinities: "si messero ad arbitrio di fortuna / Rinaldo a questa, il Saracino a quella" (1.23). Their individual Fortuna figures guide the horse back to their starting point: what they call their divinity, then, points to the non-linear design along which the narrative propels itself. As will be discussed below, episodes of forest travel like this will often signal an overlap between the characters' diegetic progression and the progression of the narrative by drawing the reader's attention to the path along which both character and

²³⁷ The magic attractions are first established in the *Innamoramento* 2.15.61-62.

author are simultaneously traveling. It may now suffice to note in this episode the third element of the ecology introduced here alongside the population and the dynamic of randomness: the role of paths and other environmental features in determining the outcome of the narrative. Each of the encounters thus far owe something to the path forged in the forest and the rest of the canto will continue to exploit the potential of the environment in generating the episodes that perpetuate the narrative.

Fleeing Rinaldo and Ferrau, for example, Angelica eventually comes to rest in a meadow, in “tenere erbette / ch’invitano a posar chi s’appresenta” (*OF* 1.38). The directional agency shown by the landscape prefigures other episodes engineered by some aspect of the terrain. Pinabello disguises a mountain cliff to trap and kill Bradamante (*OF* 2.69-76). Alcina fabricates the appearance of an island to lure in her human prey (*OF* 6.37-38). A moonlit grotto in the mountains attracts Orlando to where Isabella awaits rescue (*OF* 12.89-91) and later, in his automaton-like state, Orlando is drawn to the shoreline because “pensa farsi uno albergo in quella arena” (29.57) and there, without recognizing her, “venne a caso sopra / Angelica la bella e il suo marito” (29.58). Rivers impede travel and the winds of the oceans defy the protagonists’ attempts to navigate but the forest is by far the environment that most clearly represents the potential to alter and perpetuate the narrative. Beyond the directional agency exerted by the forest’s limited navigability that forces humans to rely on paths or non-human navigation for progress, as in the episodes already discussed, the setting also houses flora and fauna that will serve as narrative contrivances. Most importantly, the forces of *caso* and Fortuna conspire with the narrator to produce a story where even the most marvelous situations are believable, as Angelica learns soon in the first canto.

Lulled by the environment's active invitation, Angelica takes a nap but is soon joined by King Sacripante of Circassia, also drawn to the space by its relative safety and potential for solace. She overhears him cursing "Fortuna crudel, Fortuna ingrata" (*OF* 1.44) for his inability to track Angelica herself down but as Fortuna would have it, overlapping here with the poem's narrative design, "così quel ne viene a un'ora, a un punto, / ch'in mille anni o mai più non è raggiunto" (1.48). Sacripante rides with Angelica until they meet an unnamed knight who easily knocks Sacripante to the ground before hurrying off on "il camin dritto" (*OF* 1.64). Sacripante's unfortunate "caso" (described in *OF* 1.65 and 1.71) is aggravated by the arrival of a messenger along the same path as the warrior, whom the page reveals was in fact Bradamante, the chief woman warrior in Carlo's court and primagenetrix to the dynasty that would bear Ariosto's patrons. Trailing after her like a companion species, the messenger prefigures other orbits of attraction that move characters across the diegetic world, such as Orlando's pursuit by Brandimarte, in turn pursued by Fiordiligi, both movements initiated at the same time (*OF* 8.87-90). These locomotive relationships will engender further interactions that propel the narrative through its diegetic ecology. Not soon after do Sacripante and Angelica set off again in the first canto does Baiardo reappear on their road, attracted instinctively to Angelica. As they prepare to depart, Angelica, "rivolgendo a caso gli occhi" (*OF* 1.77), again spots Rinaldo, the canto thereby rounding itself out with a final chance encounter and returning her — and the reader — to the same situation from which she was trying to distance herself. While some may read Angelica's futile attempts at escape a sign of Ariosto's disenchantment with the genre says much but goes nowhere, the episode also suggests the poem's preoccupation with the development of a network of diegetic elements — characters, settings, forces — than with a single, overarching storyline. Like

Angelica, the reader must learn that itineraries through the Furioso's ecology will never be straightforward.

The first canto is thus an introduction to the ecology of poem as a whole, determined by political allegiances, familial and sexual social structures, animal navigation, the thwarting potential of Fortuna, the directional pull of roads both straight and forked, the lure of pleasant meadows, the chemical effect of enchanted rivers. While all these determinants work to propel the narrative organisms, the forces of *caso* and Fortuna are perhaps the most obvious expedients for the complication of the protagonists' itineraries, as in the first canto, with the haphazard encounter of two characters on a road or at a rest stop, the horse traveling in a circle, the arrival of companion species such as messengers and lovers. The ascription of narrative developments to these forces is perhaps the most evident attempt to shape the narrative act around an ecology but it is not the earliest. As this chapter proceeds to investigate the techniques by which Ariosto aligns the practice of narrating his poem with the interactions of its internal ecology — and specifically its forests — Angelica's motion into the woods in the tenth stanza will again be understood as a metaliterary operation.

Frames, Paths and Interstices

Another significant aspect by which Ariosto overlaps his act of narrating with his characters' interactions with the forest is the delineation of episodes with entrances to and from the forest. The introduction and conclusions to the poem are prominently marked by travel into and out of the woods, framing the story they contain with the space where much of the narrative unfolds. As has already been discussed, the first canto of the *Furioso* offers an extremely apt introduction to the poem's dependence on the forest environment for its action, often constituted by the haphazard encounters of characters en route to destinations they will

not each directly. But it also stages a literal introduction of the reader into the forest, for when Angelica flees the Bavarian encampment where she remains prisoner to the Duke of Bavaria who oversees the duel for her hand, the narrator and perforce the reader flee the scene as well, leaving behind the predictable intrigues of the courtly environment for the unpredictability of the forest:

e quando bisognò [Angelica] le spalle diede,
presaga che quel giorno esser rubella
dovea Fortuna alla cristiana fede:
entrò in un bosco, e ne la stretta via
rincontrò un cavallier ch'a piè venia (*OF* 1.10).

The forest is immediately marvelous, for not one couplet after Angelica penetrates the forest she sees a horseless horseman, an animated paradox and perfect emblem for the deprioritization of the protagonists' agency in the ecology of the *Furioso*.

For Natalino Sapegno this couplet constitutes “l'alzarsi del sipario”²³⁸ and surely the immediate spectacle of the great knight Rinaldo walking without his horse serves to inaugurate the hurried succession of run-ins that comprise this canto and many to follow, much in the way that the piazza or market housed the encounters animating early modern Italian comedies like Ariosto's own *Cassaria* that, in the spring of 1508 in the courtyard of the ducal palace, was the first original vernacular play to be staged publicly in Europe.²³⁹ But this move into the woods in the tenth canto of the *Furioso* also signals the real beginning of a poem that is merely conjured by the action of the previous nine octaves. Like a list of *dramatis personae*, the setup for the courtly duel merely reminds the reader that the legendary characters of Orlando, Rinaldo, Carlo and Angelica will continue the amorous plotlines from Boiardo's *Innamoramento*, which had been innovative in combining the erotic

²³⁸ See the commentary to *OF* 1.10 in Sapegno's abridged edition, *Orlando Furioso*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Principato 1962), 5.

²³⁹ On the performance history of *La Cassaria* see Andrea Gareffi, “Introduzione”, in Ludovico Ariosto, *Le commedie* (Turin: UTET, 2007), 1:7-79, 1:9-35.

marvels of Arthurian romance with Carolingian military narratives already adapted in Italian as in the Tuscan narrative poem *La Spagna in rima*. The opening nine stanzas of the *Furioso* therefore tacitly emblemize the most essential thematics of the earlier narrative, while the eagerness with which the *Furioso* begins its own is manifest in the urgency of Angelica's flight from court.

The first episode of the poem proper begins to unfold when she — along with the reader — encounters Rinaldo on foot in the most typical of the scenarios that generate the action of the *Furioso*, a random encounter between characters whose pre-existing relationships — here, their contrary enchantments — determine their reaction and their consequent motion. And the narrative unfolds much like Angelica's flight: the linearity of the narrative act, the forward march of the narrator stringing together events, aligns perfectly with Angelica's progress into the woods. The couplet of the tenth stanza demonstrates an overlap of narrative motion with diegetic motion, following a character from environment to environment and thus from scene to scene: the forest path marks the site of the overlapping of the narrator's and character's motion and similar paths throughout the poem will facilitate the encounters between characters, leading them and the readers from one episode to the next. The overlap between Angelica's flight into the marvelous woods and the official opening of the poem is the first of many instances that suggest the *Furioso* is represented by its forests.

This initial encounter, indeed, aptly emblemizes the ecology that will shape many of the developments in the narrative. First, the forest environment presents navigational difficulties that resulted in forged paths. These paths in turn control the passage of subsequent travelers, heightening the probability of encounters between characters of

different political allegiances that would otherwise not find often themselves in the same spaces. Angelica's entrance and the traveling of Rinaldo, named two stanzas later, also underscores the forest as a place of motion, as Calvino observes. And, indeed, the *Furioso* is not only a poem about desire as has been demonstrated by many but specifically a poem about following desires. Except under the most inviting circumstances, as Angelica discovers later in the canto, the forest always threatens the resting traveler with disorientation at the least and bodily harm at the worst. The forest in this first snapshot is presented as an environment where the trajectories of characters cross each other at random, as has been demonstrated, but also as an environment closely linked to the design according to which the narrative is propelled.

If the curtain does indeed open with this couplet, then the diegetic space in which the *Furioso* selects to introduce its ecology is the forest, where the entire first canto will elapse, one encounter after another. Readers may also notice that the forest is immediately a space of literary marvels. The figure of a horseless horseman not only reminds attentive readers of Rinaldo's loss of Baiardo in the *Innamoramento* but also presents the visual oddity of a knight, armored for horseback, traveling on foot. Inscribed into Rinaldo's physicality are the counteracting storylines of the *Innamoramento* that establish behavioral determinants: his foot travel is caused by the loss of his needed horse and his pursuit of Angelica is also a chemical reaction from enchanted waters. So not only does this couplet introduce the narrative ecology that will animate the poem but it also founds the coterminality of the forest and the space of the poem. This first entrance into the ground level of the plot is an entrance into the woods that the narrator and the readers make along with Angelica. When the curtain

is lifted, it is onto the world of literary marvels already in motion on predetermined itineraries.²⁴⁰

The suggestion that the forest of the first canto represents the poem into which Angelica and the reader simultaneously begin their journeys is confirmed by the last cantos of the poem, where the forest provides Ruggiero with his only refuge from the threats posed to the happy conclusion of his marital ambitions and, at the same time, provides the reader and author further continuation of the poem. While every other protagonist is en route to Paris, Ruggiero pursues his rivalry with Leone, even after having been named king of the Bulgarian Christians (*OF* 44.97-98) and thus after having arrived at a fitting conclusion to the poem's military preoccupations. Driven by rage rather than a specific itinerary, Ruggiero "camina / tutta la notte" because "non sa dove si por" (*OF* 44.101). Without a direction, Ruggiero "mai trova castel né villa alcuna" (*OF* 44.100), until dawn, when "Ne lo spuntar del nuovo sol vicina / a man sinistra una città comprende" (44.101). As with Angelica rushing headlong into her pursuer Rinaldo, the forest engineers a random encounter that will propel the narrative, leading Ruggiero to an inn housing one of the Greek soldiers Ruggiero and the Bulgarians had just vanquished. This encounter leads to his imprisonment by Greek courtiers (*OF* 45.9-12) and ultimately his rescue by the Greek emperor's grandson Leone (45.43-49), who will sneak him out of prison to the matrimonial contest with Bradamante, where Ruggiero — and the readers — expect the fulfillment of his destiny foretold from the poem's fourth stanza.

But as with all itineraries in the *Furioso*, this too is thwarted, as the very act of Leone's guiding Ruggiero out of prison in fact distances him from that destiny: to repay his obligation Ruggiero must fight against Bradamante wearing Leone's armor or face execution

²⁴⁰ On the belatedness represented in the *Furioso* see Tylus, "Curse of Babel", 154-155.

by the Greeks. He fights (*OF* 45.68-79) and is declared her equal (45.81) but, faced with this devastating conclusion to the wedding narrative, he flees to the one environment where the story can be kept from ending: the forest. Once there, he frees his horse Frontino (*OF* 45.92) who will ensure that his passage across the forest is as difficult as possible, given the relationship between animal navigation and the forest already discussed. Reversing the dynamic by which Leone had guided him away from both prison, Ruggiero's pitiable flight away from court — into the forest and thus back into the realm of the story — in fact brings him closer to his destiny. Devoted to Bradamante even after three days without food, Ruggiero inspires pity from Leone, who relinquishes his marriage claim (*OF* 46.42-44). Their accord newly established, Frontino reappears and, hearing Leone's horse, "v'era accorso ratto" (*OF* 46.46). Restored after three days with a nursemaid living a half league from the site of their encounter (*OF* 46.47-48), Ruggiero makes his way back to Paris for his long-awaited wedding and, in the 1532 edition, the unexpected resolution of a nearly forgotten rivalry with Rodomonte (46.101-140).

In episodes like these that prevent the closure of the narrative, the forest offers a space for it to stay afloat. Ruggiero's lackadaisical adventures before the seemingly deferred conclusion of the poem demonstrate the same pride of place that aligned the official introduction of the poem with Angelica's entrance into the woods.²⁴¹ That is, both the beginning and end of the poem confirm the intuition that the act of narration is mirrored by the protagonists' entrances and exits from the woods. As in the first canto, the overlap of narrative and diegetic progression is marked by the synchronized motion of the character with the narrator, who follows Ruggiero out of the woods and into the poem's inevitable

²⁴¹ In a session of his seminar *Magic and Marvel of the Renaissance* at JHU on 2 April 2013, Walter Stephens observed that the final few cantos of the *Furioso* present an untimeliness that makes the inevitable conclusion feel deliberately distanced.

conclusion. Perhaps the suggestion of infinite narrative potential provides the sharpest contrast between Ariosto's woods, where the woods offer a refuge from closure to a poem that, in Calvino's words, "si rifiuta di finire",²⁴² and the woods in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, which are inscribed in their very vocabulary with the promise of the Crusaders' victorious conclusion, as the following chapter argues.

The characters' first and last interactions with the forest effectively delineate the boundaries of the poem proper: the duel in the first canto is a vehicle to reintroduce the general ecology of the text and justify a hurried entrance into the woods, while the final wedding anticlimatically fulfills the destiny predicted from the very first canto. Even the reappearance of Rodomonte at Ruggiero's wedding in the 1532 edition of the *Furioso* only enacts its forceful surprise once the reader expects that the poem is effectively over. These scenes bound the poem in the same way that other entrances into the woods provide boundaries to episodes. In an example from the center of the poem Orlando and company set off on "vie coperte / dagli arbori di frondi oscuri e neri" when his pursuer Mandricardo happens upon them: "ecco un cavalliero e una donzella / lor sopravien" (*OF* 23.70). Mandricardo will go on to steal a passerby's horse, so his arrival here perpetuates his ambition to avenge his father's death by Orlando's hands.²⁴³ Ruggiero's flight into the woods, to take the example discussed earlier, is a move to perpetuate the poem's story and only when he "Nel più tristo sentire, nel peggior calle / scorrendo va, nel più intricato bosco" (*OF* 42.52) does he encounter a force that can direct him to another episode, the monstrous personification of Gelosia.

²⁴² See "La struttura del «Furioso»", 51-52.

²⁴³ This plotline is established in *Orlando innamorato* 3.1.7-13.

Similarly, adventures are found just at the edges of the forest. Traveling to Vallombrosa, Ruggiero and Bradamante “trovarò all’uscir de la foresta” (*OF* 12.37) a damsel later revealed to be Fiordispina, princess of Laodicea. Later, again “all’uscita / del bosco”, Bradamante “Ritrovò quivi Astolfo” (*OF* 23.9), whom she recognizes since, at just that moment, “A caso si trovò che fuor di testa / l’elmo allor s’avea tratto” (23.10). Often, as in the first and last cantos, the forward motion of the narrative is made to correspond with the motion of the characters, perpetuating the simile between the forest and the poem itself.²⁴⁴ The *Furioso*, as a whole and in many of its parts, is thus demarcated by forest travel, the progression of its narratives often aligning with character’s progress through the forest. But if the episodes are occasionally negotiated through paths in the woods, these same paths also generate the action of each episode.

Indeed, while the forest is often the interstitial space that connects adventures taking place elsewhere, various major episodes are wholly comprised of action determined by the environmental factors of the forest itself, in particular its spatial limitations, its advantages or disadvantages for one character’s survival and the physical forces that govern activity within it. Perhaps the most obvious determinant provided by the forest is its difficult navigability. The paths not only literalize the means of narration, the linear act of recounting, but also its endpoint, as episode after episode is comprised of clashes or charitable exchanges between characters meeting along a path. Restricting the infinite itineraries characters that can be forged through Europe’s expansive forests and thus increasing the likelihood of surprise encounters, the literary potential of paths is introduced and somewhat humorously reinforced in the first canto. The characters’ motion along these is determined by unabatable psycho-physiological impulses — often fear or lust, as in the first canto — but their encounter is

²⁴⁴ On the motion of the *Furioso*’s narrator see Bernard, “Ch’io nol lasci ne la penna”, 293-294.

determined by the forest topography itself. Angelica and Rinaldo's encounter, appearing by the tenth stanza of the first canto, is thus a miniature of the diegetic ecology of the *Furioso*, the world of a poem that follows characters with predictable, animalesque psychologies through environments that define their interaction with other characters.

Many other episodes are born of haphazard encounters along pre-existing routes, be they paths or tracks of footprints. Traveling on a wooded road to “l più largo e l più segnato colle” in the valley (*OF* 11.15), Ruggiero happens to see a mirage of Bradamante being carried away by a giant (11.19-20), which redirects his path. Traveling along a “via che di nuovo era segnata / ne l'erba” (*OF* 14.49) to hunt down on Orlando, Mandricardo encounters the princess Doralice “in mezzo il prato” (14.50). The Frankish knight Grifone encounters his traitors Martano and Orrigille in Syria by traveling on “la via più piana e più corrente” (*OF* 16.5) while his brother Aquilante and his company “contraro in una croce di due strade” Marfisa (*OF* 18.98), literalizing the narrative conjunction of her storyline with theirs in the countryside roads. Beside a river in France, Marfisa encounters an elderly woman who asks for a ride past the muddy stretch of road and, “al fin di quel sentiero” (*OF* 20.109), she spots Pinabello, who will dishonor her. Ruggiero and his retinue “si fermaro / dove un sentier fendea quell pianura; e giunger quivi un cavalier miraro” (*OF* 25.97), a knight that turns out to be his sister Marfisa. Bradamante, patrolling “la strada [...] / che per trovar Ruggier sole far spesso” (32.27), meets a soldier who recounts Ruggiero's valorous participation in the battle against the Saracens, causing her to travel “Verso Provenza per la via più diretta” (*OF* 35.33) to find him and, on the way, encounter Fiordiligi who redirects her further.

Indeed, some cantos seem comprised entirely of chance encounters, as in the first, discussed above. In the thirty-first, Rinaldo and company “Scontraro” a knight (*OF* 31.8)

who turns out to be his half-brother Guidone (31.28-31) and then “per buona sorte / Grifone et Aquilante ritrovaro” (31.37) by the banks of the Seine near Paris. Flordiligi, who had joined them on their route to the central battle outside Paris, spots her husband Brandimarte (31.59-60) and they head off in search of Orlando but are stopped at a bridge by his enemy Rodomonte (31.65). Some episodes take place at the edge of the forest, the forest path having led them directly to that episode. Traveling to Vallombrosa, Ruggiero and Bradamante “trovarò all’uscir de la foresta” a damsel later revealed to be Fiordispina (*OF* 22.37) while shortly after, again “all’uscita / del bosco” (*OF* 23.9), Bradamante sees Astolfo, whom she recognizes because — again, *a caso* — he was not wearing his helmet at just that moment.

The misdirection by paths and other environmental elements is an expedient not only to unite characters with strong repulsions, as with Angelica and Ruggiero in the first canto, but also to waylay characters that would have otherwise proceeded unproblematically to their destination or object of desire, thereby allowing a story to take form. The first canto again introduces the disorientation typical to the *Furioso*’s forests. Angelica’s unexpected encounter with Ferrau (*OF* 1.15), at a stream which her horse had chosen, demands she flee both men, for her beauty triggers an overriding lust even in unenchanted bodies. The two knights pursue her on one horse, prioritizing the biological determinant of lust over the political determinant of enmity, but the forest again thwarts their singular trajectory. When “una strada in due si dipartiva” (*OF* 1.22), the knights, unable to rationalize a direction, entrust their navigation to the force that most often governs travel across the forest: “si messero ad arbitrio di fortuna / Rinaldo a questa, il Saracino a quella” (1.23). Each instantiation of Fortuna, the Christian and the Islamic, corresponds to the two paths that the knights follow individually but also aligns with the narrative thread. Ferrau’s path leads him

back to the river where he spotted Angelica, enough misdirection to transfer his energies from the hopeless pursuit of Angelica to the more realizable search for his helmet (*OF* 1.24), initiated by the reappearance of the ghost of Angelica's slain brother Argalia. As he travels off, the narrator pans across the forest to follow Rinaldo "che da costui tenea diverse strade" (*OF* 1.31), whose path leads him to his horse, Baiardo, who does not respond to his call (1.32).

As with Ferrau's redirection back to the waters and his search for a helmet, the return of Rinaldo's horse allows for redirection of his itinerary, and thus the opportunity for the narrator to alternate storylines, as he does here: "Segue Rinaldo [Baiardo], e d'ira si distrugge: / ma seguitiamo Angelica che fugge" (*OF* 1.32). While this canto exposes the reader to the technique of narrative interruption Daniel Javitch famously described as "cantus interruptus",²⁴⁵ it also introduces readers to the movement of the poem that is mirrored in the movement of its characters. This movement is characterized by repeated directional breaks — Calvino describes it as "movimento a linee spezzate, a zig zag" — both in the protagonists' actual journeys and in the directionality of the narrative. The breaks in linearity often signal the overlap the diegetic and metanarrative plans and the fork where Rinaldo and Ferrau meet offers an excellent example of the ability of the *Furioso* to mirror narration with motion: the narrative splits into two paths when "una strada" becomes two, the first path circling back to the original road that then provides a narratological passage to the "diverse strade" leading to Rinaldo's second path.

Ariosto in fact makes the overlap of narrative path with diegetic forest path explicit in both chivalric works. Alternating between two episodes in canto 14 of the *Furioso*, the narrator uses a traveling metaphor to describe his macronarrative design:

²⁴⁵ See "Cantus Interruptus in the *Orlando Furioso*", *MLN* 95.1 (1980): 66-80.

Or l'alta fantasia, ch'un sentier solo
non vuol ch'i'segua ognor, quindi mi guida,
e mi ritorna ove il moresco stuolo
assorda di rumor Francia [...] (14.65).

This leap from Mandricardo and Doralice's wandering by a hillside river back to the battlefield at Paris, which Mandricardo had abandoned in search of Orlando, is characteristic of the broken linearity of the *Furioso*. Retracing his path, as do Ferrau and Rinaldo, the narrator is able to harness the expansive energy of his poem. In a poetic fragment with much more restricted ambitions — the *Cinque canti*, which purports to recount the defeat of Charlemagne and the death of Roland at Roncesvalles as told in the eleventh-century French narrative poem *Le chanson de Roland* and which Ariosto left incomplete in 1520²⁴⁶ — the narratological path becomes a sign of how eerily connected the major situations seem in comparison to the plotlines of the *Furioso*. In an interruption at the second of the *Cinque canti*, the narrator announces a transition very unlike those in the larger Orlando poem — to which the fragment Ariosto at least initially conceived as a “poco di giunta al mio *Orlando furioso*”²⁴⁷ — a metaliterary admission that perfectly emblemizes the unsettling proximity that distinguishes the narrower *Cinque canti* from the expansive *Furioso*.

The second of its five cantos opens with a lofty praise of fatherly justice, similar to the exordia used throughout the *Furioso* to introduce a moral value relevant to the episode. Replete with classical references and distinctly high language, he catalogues Romans and Greeks, mortals and immortals, and briefly, and within the register of this opening, discusses

²⁴⁶ Alberto Casadei resolves the *vexata quaestio* of the dating of the *Cinque canti* by establishing a draft produced in 1519 or even late 1518 and at least partially revised at a second point in 1520; see “Alcune considerazioni sui «Cinque canti»”, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 165 (1988): 161-179.

²⁴⁷ See letter 26 from Ariosto to fellow d'Este courtier Mario Equicola, dated 15 October 1519, in *Le lettere*, ed. Angelo Stella (Milan: Mondadori, 1965). A similar description of the work is in a 17 February 1532 letter Ariosto writes to Federico II, Duke of Mantua, where Ariosto mentions a “poca di aggiunta ch'io son per dare al mio *Furioso*”; see letter 196. On the relationship of the *Cinque canti* to the *Furioso* see David Quint, “Introduction”, in Ludovico Ariosto, *Cinque canti / Five Cantos*, tr. Alexander Sheers and David Quint (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1-44, 1-25.

the birth of *Sospetto*, the worst of all evils. The reader, familiar with the almost frantic energy of the *Furioso*'s jumping between storylines accepts the allusion as part of the exordium and prepares for the resumption of the story proper. The narrator then interrupts with a direct address to the reader:

non però dal mio sentier mi scosto;
anzi farò questo ch'or narro uscire
dove poi vi parrà che sia a proposto (CC 2.10).

The reader, so used to the authorial redirection of the *Furioso*, may have barely noticed the remark before continuing onto what looks to be a new episode unfolding, with unique characters and setting. Ariosto describes a king who lives in a moated tower to ward off any potential assassins. When his wife murders him for his repeated mistrust, he is sent to the underworld, where he is ironically relieved of his earthly paranoia. For an appropriate punishment, he is returned to earth where *Sospetto* can torment him without end. With the description of his torture, the noun *Suspicion* takes on more and more physical characteristics. Before it had been said that “l'opresse” (CC 2.14), a still fairly figurative action, but now *Sospetto* is described as entering his body and physically combining with him. To conclude this introductory novella, Ariosto remarks that eventually the king “divenuto era il *Sospetto* istesso” (CC 2.17). And with this transformation, the whole narrative structure collapses.

The narrator here has transformed the *Sospetto* encountered in the exordium, functioning rhetorically as an abstract vice, and implanted it into this historical episode, where, in its descriptive and compellingly mortal register, it will assume a more physical and less metaphysical identity. When *Sospetto* literally consumes the king, the two stylistically distinct stories consume and collapse in on each other and the seemingly winding path now seems to make a more direct course. The narrator announces his return to the earlier story,

left off some twenty stanzas prior, of Alcina's project to destroy the Frankish empire. Back within the official, present-tense plotline of the poem, she immediately recruits the personification-turned-person to urge a second king, Desiderio, into military action against Carlo Magno. By the time this supernatural yet human being enters Desiderio's chest (*CC* 2.24), this second unit of narrative is absorbed by the third. The narrator's path is now perfectly visible: while conjuring the surface of three separate episodes — reproductions not only of the *Furioso's* varied narrative but the occasionally tenuous connections linking self-referential commentary, fictional episodes and accounts of mythological, historical and contemporary situations — he is following a single straightforward story, the birth and various incarnations of Sospetto, then deflating any literary value that the supernatural episode would have held on its own by collapsing it directly into the military macronarrative, which will occupy almost uninterruptedly the remainder of the poem. The vision of stringent causality is maintained throughout the *Cinque canti* and is rarely matched by the *Furioso's* epic leaps.

After all this pretended variation, readers might rightly ask what aims this exciting episodic structure served when it is immediately dispelled? And why confess the subterfuge in advance? An answer might be found in the centrality of political deception of the plot of the *Cinque canti*. But the politely tragic itinerary of the French precedent, wherein Ganelon's villainy is anomalous and universally despised, is for Ariosto little more than a literary mold, while the role of Gano's meticulous treachery in the *Cinque canti* is seen as a formidable cultural threat.²⁴⁸ Though the text is to some extent incomplete — abandoned, returned to

²⁴⁸ On the reflections made in *Cinque canti* of the conciliar models adopted in light of threats to the geopolitical dominance of the Catholic Church see Elizabeth Watson, "Ariosto's *Cinque Canti* and the Threat to Europe", in Joseph Marino and Melinda Schlitt, eds., *Perspectives on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2001), 193-207.

and revised and abandoned once again, as Alberto Casadei has revealed²⁴⁹ — and the sole responsible party, Gano of the Maganza clan, inevitably faces execution for his treachery against the House of Chiaramonte, the text that remains presents Gano’s manipulations as a success and certainly not the most pathetic plotline. The last image of the poem (*CC* 5.92) instead sees Charles, the only truly upright and passionless character as the only one truly punished, pushed to his near death by his own knights who, over the course of the five cantos, have become increasingly loyal to themselves above all others. Gano, meanwhile, spends much of the poem traveling between one production of misinformation and another, passing through various kingdoms by repeatedly distorting appearances: forging letters (*CC* 3.25-36), misrepresenting battle conditions (3.52-64) and employing the shape-shifting demon Vertunno (who first appears in 1.102). Gano’s path is identical to the narrator’s, each proceeding through disparate spaces to their ultimate end by conjuring false expectations.

Whether this episode reflects Ariosto’s misgivings with contemporary political developments or disillusionment with the highly teleological Roncesvalles fixture to chivalric narrative lies outside the scope of this inquiry but the excursus does reveal in the *Cinque canti* the same tendency to imagine his narrative as a path as in the *Furioso*. Indeed, readers can see the promise for a more expansive story, the sort that abounds in the forests of the *Furioso*, wholly dashed in the Bohemian woods that Frankish troops fell in the *Cinque canti*:

Cade l’eccelso pin, cade il funebre
cipresso, cade il velenoso tasso,
cade l’olmo atto a riparar che l’ebre
viti non giaccian sempre a capo basso;
cadono, e fan cadendo le latebre
cedere agli occhi et alle gambe il passo:
piangon sopra le mura i pagan stolti,
vedendo alli lor dèi gli seggi tolti (*CC* 2.125).

²⁴⁹ See Casadei, “Alcune considerazioni”, 175-179.

As with a nearly identical deforestation scene in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, discussed in the following chapter, the mood here is decidedly somber: the trees are anthropomorphized and the vocabulary is funereal. As in the *Liberata*, the forest is cut down to build military equipment, in this case, an immense walled stockade outside Prague, furthering the motif of confinement seen throughout the *Cinque canti*: Orlando is routed in asphyxiating alpine air (CC 2.56), Rinaldo is cut off from supplies in the gloomy countryside (5.38), Ruggiero and Astolfo are imprisoned in a whale which slowly traces the outline of continental Europe (CC 4.13-89). The niches and paths that have been exposed to the eyes are the manifestations of the poetic potential of the forest setting that the *Furioso* advertises by linking its narrative to the ecology of the forest.

Returning to the *Furioso*, the interruptions in the protagonists' travel that the narrator finds opportune to use to thwart his own straightforward narration are often the result of environmental factors. As seen in the previous examples, the topography of the forest thwarts the characters' journeys in tandem with jumps in the narrative. But the animals and intangible forces associated with the forest often machinate these misdirections as well. Indeed, the directional agency of the knights' horses in the first canto anticipates the many animal and humanoid agents who direct the motion of the *Furioso*'s human characters. The most famous means of animal transport is the hippogriff that conveys protagonists from one adventure to the next as need dictates: such is the case with Ruggiero (in *OF* 4.45, 6.17-23, 10.69), a magically equipped Angelica (11.13), Astolfo when in dire need (33.96-103, 34.48, 38.24). While the reader — and character — may find the hypogryph predictable only in that it consistently deposits its passengers in unpredictable places, the hypogryph always responds to the exigences of the narrative, often rescuing protagonists or delivering them

where they are most needed but in so doing thwarting their straightforward narrative. In the *Cinque canti*, where the potential for a richer literary ecology is constrained by the narrative teleology, Ariosto figures animal transport as yet another confinement, notably in Ruggiero's imprisonment in Alcina's whale (*CC* 4.13-89).

The supernatural beings in the *Furioso* similarly redirect the human protagonists' itineraries, for better or for worse. Melissa is particularly invested in the wedding of Bradamante and Ruggiero, so she often guides characters and props to sites that further their union, from her direction of Bradamante to Merlin's castle to learn of her destiny (*OF* 3.13) to her leading Leone to the forest where Ruggiero chose to starve to death rather than suffer Leone's marriage to Bradamante (46.20-22). Indeed, the narrator remarks that, in searching for Bradamante to tell her where to find Ruggiero, Melissa

[...] tenne
la dritta via dove l'errante e vaga
figlia d'Amon seco a incontrar si venne (7.45).

Other sorcerers cause misdirection, most famously in the *fata* Alcina's capture and imprisonment of Astolfo who had mistaken a whale under her control for an island (6.41-43) and also in the two enchanted castles where the wizard Atlante hopes to keep Ruggiero detained. David Quint suggests that Atlante and his castles represent the timeless stasis of the chivalric romance as exemplified by the Boiardan parent poem,²⁵⁰ an irreality that Ariosto hopes to dash by inscribing into the world of his poem the verisimilar forces of death, entropy and chaos. On the ground level, furthermore, are a parallel cast of characters accompanying the knights, their horses who continually interrupt the linearity of human protagonists and the narrative itself in myriad ways: they go missing, return, get lost and, most importantly, are left to make navigational decisions for their riders. The first canto

²⁵⁰ "The Figure of Atlante", 80-84.

introduces the role of horse travel in perpetuating the centrifugal narrative, while the central episode of Orlando's insanity, discussed in the following section, will solidify the intuition presented at the opening of the poem that the forest stands for the narrative. But another force conspires both in Orlando's insanity and in the first canto's horse travel, the invisible but ever-present agency of Fortuna or chaos. As is revealed in the titular episode of the poem, Orlando's encounter with the forest and, indeed, with the texture of the poem itself is the result of this elaborate ecology.

The Forest as *Furioso* at the Center of the Poem

This extended reading of the first canto above serves not only to introduce the concept of narrative ecologies but also to show the particular dynamics of the diegetic ecology the *Furioso* constructs: a network of characters and environments determined to generate reactions and subjected to the directional and temporal disruptions of *caso* and *fortuna*. This diegetic world is presented to the reader first as a forest, laying the foundation for a metaliterary reading of the forest as the primary space of the narrative. The central episode evidences another phase in this ecology of chance and determinism but amplifies the resonance between the forest and the narrative itself, carving it into the trees that will narrate, to Orlando and to readers, the story of Angelica and Medoro. Those passages will now be investigated as to the equations they suggest between the forest and the *Furioso* as a whole.

The episode can be said to begin with the introduction of Medoro into the diegetic ecology. He emerges after his king Dardinello is slain: his exceptional piety determines his commitment to bury the king but cannot dictate his directionality in the dark. Medoro thus

prays to the moon, which the *Furioso* associates with Islam through its crescent iconography, and the resulting meteorological reaction is auspicious:

La luna a quel pregar la nube aperse
(o fosse caso o pur la tanta fede)
[...].
[...]

Rifulse lo splendor molto più chiaro
ove d'Almonte giacea morto il figlio (*OF* 18.185-186).

As in the first canto, this episode again presents an ecology in which a character's motion is determined by social and religious pressures, beneath a cloud cover altered by a disruptive force. In both passages, the reader cannot conclude whether randomness or divinity is active. As the conflict is still raging in Paris, Medoro and his compatriot Zerbino seek refuge in the forest. Occupying the last stanza of the canto, the frightful vision of the forest is marked by literary reference:

Era a quel tempo ivi una selva antica,
d'ombrese piante spessa e di virgulti,
che, come labirinto, entro s'intrica
di stretti calli e sol da bestie culti.
Speran d'averla i duo pagan sì amica,
ch'abbi a tenerli entro a' suoi rami occulti.
Ma chi del canto mio piglia diletto,
un'altra volta ad ascoltarlo aspetto (*OF* 18.192).

The ancient wood recalls various settings of classical literature and the comparison to a labyrinth recalls other clearly metaliterary inventions in the poem, such as Atlante's castle. In their trepidatious approach, though, they also recognize the ecological agency determining their outcome: they hope it will be friendly to them and hold them in its folds. Such a hope is only logical alongside an understanding of the chance — but not the guarantee — that the characteristics of the landscape might further their trajectories, internal confirmation of the narrative ecology at work. Like Angelica's at the opening of the poem, Medoro's entrance

into the woods here immediately displays the narrative ecology at work, alerting readers to the potential for metaliterary interpretation that will continue throughout this forest episode.

Unguarded and encumbered by the body of Dardinello, Medoro is an easy target for the Frankish. Zerbino takes off in pursuit of his attacker, while Medoro is ostensibly left to die. But the narrative design does not intend for his trajectory to end here and, as with the moonbeam that led him to the body, it manipulates the ecology to propel the narrative: “Gli sopravvenne a caso” (*OF* 19.17) a graceful shepherdess. Readers are expected to spare the narrator the task of identifying her and comprehend the chance encounter before it even happens:

Tanto è ch'io non ne dissi più novella,
ch'a pena riconoscer la doveste:
questa, se non sapete, Angelica era,
del gran Can del Catai la figlia altiera (*OF* 19.17).

Sympathetic to the Saracen army generally and quite moved by his evident heroism, Angelica plans to heal him, remembering having passed a “piaggia amena” (*OF* 19.22) containing a medicinal herb. Again, the narrative ecology yields the situation that will continue the episode -- through the political determinants of the characters inherited, namely, the Franco-Saracen enmity and Sino-Saracen allegiance, the aspects of the psychological archetypes installed into the characters, like Medoro's piety and Angelica's pity, and the topographical factors of the specific environment, such as the well-trafficked forest roads and magical flora. With the description of the meadow as “amena”, the *Furioso* cites a rhetorical fixture named in a disapproving passage of Horace's *Ars poetica*:

[...] inceptis gravibus plerumque et magna professis
purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter
adsuitur pannus, cum lucus et ara Dianae

et properantis aquae per amoenos ambitus agros
aut flumen Rhenum aut pluvius describitur arcus [...].²⁵¹

Making a reference to the stock setting that would come to be known as the *locus amoenus*,²⁵² the ecology immediately becomes a coded literary space, recalling Petrarca's inviting landscapes and foreshadowing the landscape that will be quite literally inscribed with amorous verse.

Studying the encounter between Medoro and Angelica more closely, the literary potential of *caso* becomes ever clearer. Having made himself a target carrying his dead commander's body, Medoro is wounded and lies dying when Angelica arrives, right on cue:

Quando Angelica vide il giovinetto
languir ferito, assai vicino a morte,
che del suo re che giacea senza tetto,
più che del proprio mal si dolea forte;
insolita pietade in mezzo al petto
si senti entrar per disusate porte,
che le fe' il duro cor tenero e molle,
e più, quando il suo caso egli narrolle (*OF* 19.20).

In the space of four octaves, Ariosto links two major valences of the word "caso": the randomness that had moved Angelica into the environment that had generated Medoro's misfortune and case of the misfortune itself as it eventually gets narrated to her. *Caso* is used throughout to refer to the protagonists' strife but most often in situations of recounting or making cases for various causes. *Caso* in the *Furioso*, then, has two opportunities for metaliterary resonance: either as the force that shapes and generates the narrative or as instances of diegesis, the effectiveness of which is implicitly evaluated by the responses of the other characters.

²⁵¹ *Ars poetica* 14-18 in Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, revised ed., tr. and ed. Henry Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 442-489.

²⁵² The term appears in Isidore's *Etymologiarum libri* 14.8.33 as a geographical category and married with Horace's description to become a generic fixture in European literature; see Curtius, *Europäische Literatur*, 198-207.

Chance brings Angelica and Medoro together and the same ecology of chance will further their relationship. The two lovers will receive the hospitality of a shephard they encounter looking for a lost steer, an encounter generated by the economy of animal husbandry, coupled with the biological instincts of the young runaway animal. Chance, too, introduces Orlando into the same environment, which he reaches only after “Lo strano corso che tenne il cavallo / del Saracin pel bosco senza via” (*OF* 23.100). From here Orlando is lured in by the *locus amoenus* as an opportunity to rest and, only then, notices the writing that covers every surface of the clearing: trees, rocks and cottage.

But it is worth refining the agency exerted by this randomness, which at several points likened to divine action. When Medoro seeks to carry away his slain commander Darindello, he prays to the goddess of the moon, again related to the Islamic crescent, and the narrator leaves the cause of the resulting lunar spotlight open: “La luna a quel pregar la nube aperse / (o fosse caso o pur la tanta fede)”. Divine operation or random astronomical phenomenon? Either way, each event names the propulsion visible at every encounter between authorial design and a vital narrative ecosystem. The equivocation between divinity and randomness appears later in the poem as alternative explanations, when Bradamante falls out of the forest at precisely the right time to see Astolfo helmetless in the enchanted compound of the mage Atlante:

A caso si trovò che fuor di testa
l'elmo allor s'avea tratto il paladino;
si che tosto ch'uscì de la foresta,
Bradamante conobbe il suo cugino.
Di lontan salutollo, e con gran festa
gli corse, e l'abbracciò poi più vicino;
e nominossi, et alzò la visiera,
e chiaramente fe' veder ch'ell'era.

Non potea Astolfo ritrovar persona
a chi il suo Rabican meglio lasciasse,
perché dovesse averne guardia buona
e renderglielo poi come tornasse,

de la figlia del duca di Dordona;
e parvegli che Dio gli la mandasse.
Vederla volentier sempre solea,
ma pel bisogno or più ch'egli n'avea (*OF* 23.10-11).

The coincidence of randomness with a perceived divine expedience as explanations for these outcomes is no mistake, for the divinities in the poem are, like *caso*, just metonymy for the narrative ecology that Ariosto shapes.

The ecology is at work again while Angelica seeks to heal Medoro. She remembers having passed dittamy or another medicinal herb in her travels, so she takes him with her to it. A runaway heifer causes its shepherd to follow it, another in the series of companion species following joint itineraries. The shepherd comes across the pitiable pair, and offers them lodging. When Medoro recovers, they are able to consummate their passions with marriage, sex and copious celebratory graffiti:

Fra piacer tanti, ovunque un arbor dritto
vedesse ombrare o fonte o rivo puro,
v'avea spillo o coltel subito fitto;
così, se v'era alcun sasso men duro:
ed era fuori in mille luoghi scritto,
e così in casa in altritanti il muro,
Angelica e Medoro, in vari modi (*OF* 19.36).

The couple carve amorous verse on any tree standings upright, turning phallic sites of lovemaking into explicit records of their passage. Leaving aside the suggestive connotations raised between textual and sexual activity, the forest around the shepherd's cottage has become literally inscribed with love lyrics, inscriptions that will engineer Orlando's encounter with the *Furioso* several cantos later.

This encounter takes place after Orlando has intervened in Zerbino's murder of Pinabello and is readying his horse to search for Mandricardo. As with Rinaldo and Ferrau, Orlando's horse and the forest environment will again become vehicles of the redirecting impulses of the narrative design. The trackless forest, together with a horse operating on its

own directionality, lead him to the very clearing where Angelica and Medoro wed, which also attracts Orlando as a *locus amoenus* suitable for resting and taking water. But more alluring than either the crystalline waters or overall charm of the environment are the curious carved trees and chalk graffiti that Orlando suddenly notices all around him:

Volgendosi ivi intorno, vide scritti
molti arbuscelli in su l'ombrosa riva.
Tosto che fermi v'ebbe gli occhi e fitti,
fu certo esser di man de la sua diva (*OF* 23.102).

He discerns Angelica's hand in the writing, suggesting that this graffiti is not just a recounting of the couple's elopement but it is also the tangible proof of their encounter and sojourn in the clearing. That is, they not only tell the story of Angelica's elopement — they are the story and thus Orlando *vide scritti molti arbuscelli*, trees written *on*, but also trees written *into* a broader, more polyvalent story. This story suggests a broader narrative ecology in which Orlando is not the center and this predetermined protagonist cannot accept the displacement of his priority that such an ecology entails.

Before discussing Orlando's furious reaction to this text, it will be useful to consider the further metaliterary implications of these carved trees, for it is this scene that provides the implicit yet omnipresent metaphor that the *Furioso* is its forest and is, thereby, an ecology dominated by *caso*. The various arrivals at the forest at the center of the *Furioso* present all the major ecological elements detailed thus far: the agency of immaterial dynamics like *caso*, the directional force of paths and animal protagonists and the needs that arise from biological and social conditions. This scene therefore presents the fullest instantiation of the metaphor between text and forest. The forest is associated with randomness not only within the poem itself — Medoro is led into the forest by *caso*, Angelica spots him by chance, Orlando is

delivered to their love nest by his confused and weary horse — but also by long-established cultural traditions that saw in the forest the rawest texture of chance itself.

These traditions can be traced to some of the earliest texts in Western metaphysics. As discussed in the first chapter, Aristotle innovated metaphysical vocabulary by describing the first phase of material generation as *ὄλη*, ‘wood’, to stand in for several Platonic terms describing the chaotic prematerial realm. When carried into Latin, *ὄλη* split into the literal, wooden *silva* and the abstract, metaphysical *materia*, the latter becoming the preferred translation for all metaphysical matter in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian editions Ariosto would have known. But the forest remained associated with states of disorder: Bernardus Silvestris’s mid twelfth-century Platonic prosimetrical vision on the metaphysics of the universe, the *De mundi universitate* or *Cosmographia*, opens with a request from Natura to Noys to impose order on the chaotic state of the still-forming world, summed up as “*Silva rigens, informe chaos, concretio pugnax*”.²⁵³ In the creation grove, the *Cosmographia* envisions the forest populated by random patterns of tree growth. Lucretius, the poet-philosopher of Republican Rome repopularized in fifteenth-century Florence,²⁵⁴ envisions a world that evolves from chaotically determined forms. While he does not explicitly link the forest and randomness, his followers certainly did. In Florence around 1505, when Lucretius was very much in fashion, Piero di Cosimo imagines an *Incendio nella foresta* (**figure 4**) that situates a Lucretian allegory in that most chaotic ecosystem, a forest on fire.²⁵⁵ A runaway bull features prominently, embodying randomness in the same way it will in the central

²⁵³ *Cosmographia* 1.18.

²⁵⁴ On Lucretius’s critical fortune in early modern Italy see Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). See also Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton, 2011).

²⁵⁵ On the painting, Ashmolean Museum A420, see Catherine Whistler and David Bomford, *The Forest Fire by Piero di Cosimo* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1999).

episode of the *Furioso*. In Angelo Poliziano's incomplete *Stanze per la giostra*, the topography of which Mario Martelli has argued represents a programmatic metaphysic ascension to God,²⁵⁶ the knight Iulio wanders aimlessly around a forest before encountering the white deer — more random animal motion — that will lead the wayward Iulio to glory.



Figure 4: *Incendio nella foresta* by Piero di Cosimo

The leap from the chaos of the forest to the presence of a divinity is not difficult, even for the supposedly godless poets Lucretius and Ariosto. In the Roman tradition of verse narratives, forays into the woods often led to encounters with the divine,²⁵⁷ while the association with the forest and Christian hermeticism is also longstanding.²⁵⁸ Assuming Ariosto was aware of such traditions, it would seem that the *Furioso*'s repeated staging of a random encounter in the woods revises the divine encounter with the haphazard. Surely, the dieties and chaos of the *Furioso* are each metaliterary constructions that represent the progressing directionality of the narratives on its march to closure but further equivocations between *caso* and the divine, discussed below, present additional opportunities for the

²⁵⁶ See Mario Martelli's introduction to the *Stanze* in Alberto Asor Rosa, ed., *Letteratura italiana: Le opere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 1:803.

²⁵⁷ See Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, 25-34.

²⁵⁸ Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 47-59.

notoriously godless *Furioso* to unproblematically introduce a divinity, opportunities the poem rejects.

Among the more significant secular cultural manifestations of the association between the forest and randomness is the tradition of titling miscellanies as *silvae*. While other naturalistic titles were applied to the hodgepodes of advice, quotations, prayers and poems that circulated in Europe before and after the invention of print — especially the Hellenistic epigrammatist Meleager's *Garland* of poets epitomized as flowers, inspiring flower-based genres like the Greek anthology and the Latin florilegium — the *silva* enjoyed immense popularity well into the seventeenth-century and continued to structure poetic collections even well beyond then, including Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Among the more notable *silvae* are Statius's almost epistolary verse and the prelusions of Angelo Poliziano, who commented on Statius's *Silvae* extensively, neither of which truly conform to the classical definition of an artless collection of occasional texts — but Ariosto would have come across scores of truly chaotically organized *silvae* in the collections they would have accessed at court.

But the most important link between the forest and randomness concerns the very essence of storytelling: narratives and forests are by their very nature spaces of surprise and Bernardus and Ariosto occupy opposite sides of a major literary phenomenon and one which solidified the myriad associations between chaos, forests and texts: the development of the chivalric romance. While their origins can be found in oral narratives from various intellectual centers in tenth-century Europe, these vernacular poems see some of their richest elaborations in late twelfth-century France with the romances of a poet one or two generations after Bernardus, Chrétien de Troyes. Chrétien drew on narrative cycles already

circulating in oral form, if not also in manuscripts, that concerned paladins who represented the contemporaneous code of chivalry. As in the *Furioso*, these knights are imported into Chrétien's poetry with predetermined attributes and destinies and their adventures are often poetic occasions to address coeval social issues. Meditating on the possible world of the *chanson des gestes*, Chrétien recognizes that these adventures can only take wing outside the typical settings of the court and battlefield where social structures and unswervable character traits determine all action. So where else but the forest, where nobles interact in ways their rank may have prevented them from acting at court, can the characters respond to phenomena their courtly and sheltered experience may not have prepared them for, providing the novelty necessary for literature? Where else but "the shadow of civilization", to use Robert Harrison's term,²⁵⁹ would an inventive poet want to stage novel encounters for these too predictably civilized characters?

One of Chrétien's later romances, *Yvain*, subtitled *Le chevalier au lion*, exposes Chrétien's awareness of the dependence of his genre on the forest. Halfway through a poem comprised of tales recounted at court, the title protagonist is inspired to pursue his own adventures and postpones his marriage for a year of errantry in the woods. But his successful exploits lead directly ("tot") to further delays:

Et li anz passe totevoie
 sel fist tot l'an mes sir Yvains
 si bien, que mes sire Gauvains
 se penoit de lui enorer,
 et si le fist tant demorer
 que toz li anz fu traspeszez
 et de tot l'autre encor assez [...].²⁶⁰

When he learns that his beloved has wed another man in this timespan, he goes insane and is only returned to his senses by a sympathetic noblewoman. While the obvious influence of

²⁵⁹ See Harrison, *Forests*, 38.

²⁶⁰ *Yvain* 2676-2681.

this romance on the *Furioso* is still understudied — as is the role Seneca's *Hercules furens* played on both — perhaps even more influential than the trope of insanity from unrequited love is the poem's exploitation of the forest ecology. The second half of the poem is a warped mirror of Yvain's life at court, after the expectation to return from the forest gives way to the desperation that arises from his potentially interminable detention there.

Yvain's madness — like Orlando's, in Ariosto's adaptation of this scene — can be read not only as a response to heartbreak but as the traumatic realization that his position within the forest is no longer as a courtly protagonist: with no deadlines or wife to return to, Yvain is merely another knight wandering in the woods. Orlando too ceases being the center of his own narrative when the woods recount his beloved's elopement. As in the *Furioso*, the forest in *Yvain* embodies the potential for a setting not only to transport protagonists to their destinies but also to thwart and complicate their trajectories. The forest introduces the dynamic of surprise to an overwhelmingly predictable narrative matrix — it is, in short, the story itself.

The distinction between the embrace of the forest in each work consists in the extent of their metaliterary ambition. Both poets are certainly drawing on the relationship between the forest, that mirror of stable human ecosystems and the narrative poem, which depends on the construction of worlds in which predictable behaviors can nonetheless arrive at surprising ends. But by strengthening the associations between randomness and the forest — thereby amplifying the narratological potential of his characters' interactions — and also by making the forest and the narrative text in the central episode actually coincide, Ariosto's forest seems to identify itself much more than Chrétien's as a metaliterary critique on the operations of the narrative poem. To the extent that the *Furioso* proposes itself as

coterminous with its forest, such a representation also strongly emphasizes the *Furioso* as metaliterature, a poem about how poetry works.

Such is the lesson awaiting Orlando in the central episode but he resists such a metaliterary interpretation out of the instinct to preserve his primacy, manifesting in increasingly elaborate misprisions. First he reasons that the signator “altra Angelica sia” (*OF* 23.103). He then hazards that *Medoro* is a fanciful epithet for himself but cannot sustain that interpretation either. Unable to inhabit a world in which Angelica is not his property — at least, his to lose in a fair fight — Orlando peers into the insanity that readers have been led to expect from the the very second stanza of the poem: “Fu allora per uscir del sentiment / si tutto in preda del dolor si lassa” (*OF* 23.112). But he arrives at a more complex reading to preserve his sanity and guesses that if the names are not misused the writing as a whole must have been:

Poi ritorna in sé alquanto, e pensa come
possa esser che non sia la cosa vera:
che voglia alcun così infamare il nome
de la sua donna e crede e brama e spera,
o gravar lui d’insopportabil some
tanto di gelosia, che se ne pera;
ed abbia quel, sia chi si voglia stato,
molto la man di lei bene imitato (*OF* 23.114).

The suspicion of forgery fails again when Orlando visits the cottage and sees the same writing covering the bedroom. The contextualized writing here transforms a possibly mendacious act of communication into a confirmation of all the activity that the room testifies.

Orlando despairs and the shepherd moves to lift his spirits the most appropriate way he knows how, by telling the tale of the two lovers behind all the inscriptions. He has performed his role before:

Il pastor che lo vede così oppresso
da sua tristizia, e che voria levarla,
l'istoria nota a sé, che dicea spesso
di quei duo amanti a chi volea ascoltarla,
ch'a molti dilettevole fu a udire,
gl'incominciò senza rispetto a dire (OF 23.118).

This well rehearsed “istoria” confirms the story Orlando’s predetermined protagonist mentality had been unable to read and the reaction the comprehension provokes is explosive. Now nearly furious, Orlando destroys all evidence of the writing, in an attempt to eradicate the proof of their union but eventually the rationality upon which even his rage is based also breaks down. For Orlando cannot erase Angelica’s marriage — it is inscribed into the very destabilizing ecology has moved him along throughout the poem. The ecology is in conflict with a mental state defined by predetermined characteristics, Orlando’s confident pursuit of Angelica and his commitment to the protagonist identity endowed to him by Boiardo’s poem. Thus the complete breakdown of his intellectual capacities: if he can no longer understand Angelica with respect to himself, he who is preprogrammed to be *Orlando innamorato*, as Boiardo’s poem came to be called, then he can no longer understand the world around him. No matter what tools Orlando applies to the text, there is no way to make that information cohere with the worldview he holds in his head, in which he and Angelica have been predestined by Boiardo’s literary tradition to fall in love.

So not only has Orlando stumbled onto a *locus amoenus* in a forest that is very much associated with writing but he has also stumbled onto the texture of the poem itself: he has realized there is a poem going on around him and he is not its central character. This is the real root of Orlando’s insanity — not so much recognizing that he cannot possess Angelica but rather that the notion of possessing Angelica is a narrative structure in which the subject or hero position can be filled by anyone at random, even an impractically lowly Saracen footsoldier. Anticipating a metaliterary engagement with the genre that Cervantes will

perfect, a character here becomes aware of the narrative architecture of which he is a part. The realization proves too disastrous, even traumatic. Whatever the case, Orlando's response is to destroy the target of his rage, the text itself: "Tagliò lo scritto e 'l sasso" (*OF* 23.130). The writing and the rock are not just the targets of his anger: the rock *is* the writing, as is the rest of the forest that he attacks. The great irony here is that Orlando's realization of the narrative and against which he attempts to rebel in fact confirms the title and promise of the poem he is in. While reader and character are now aware of the text, the dramatic irony available only to readers, is that the text is no longer the *Orlando innamorato* but instead the *Orlando furioso* and that the central scene of the narrative has just been staged out of an attempt to destroy the text entirely.

There are various perspectives on the discovery of the textuality of Orlando's world. To Orlando, who arrives with the narrative ecology all spelled out for him, this is an overwhelming amount of information: to see a story written into all the aspects of its setting, the trees, the house, the room, the host's dialogue, the mountain. Orlando realizes that there is text all around him, a nod to the sense that in Ariosto's time, with the explosion of possibilities for publication, everything must have seemed like a text. And, indeed, everything had at least become appropriate for textual treatment, with treatises and handbooks on nearly every subject imaginable appeared after the explosion of the print industry. The works of Machiavelli and Castiglione deserve mention in this context, for though their guides to the art of rule and courtiership were only printed after the first edition *Furioso* had already been printed, partial manuscript versions had previously circulated and reflected the contemporaneous cultural meditation on the amount of editorializing at work with everyday civic life, in behavior, speech, even belief systems. To Ariosto and his readers,

the world has become an enormous text —to be curated, corrected, reproduced, fabricated and sold — but it has only just been revealed to them as such. A later poet like Tasso will find this superficial aspect of culture worthy of disdain and his is still the prevailing historical attitude about mid sixteenth-century Italy. But for any of the maligned formalism to take root in literature and in other cultural aspects of the age, cultural mediators needed to understand the first step in achieving the *sprezzatura* that would come to emblemize courtly Italy in Ariosto's time: recognizing the pliability of one's own exteriority and realizing that the world is a text to be edited.

But such a conclusion, as the *Furioso* shows its readers, can be easily turned inside out. While all worlds are texts, the reverse might be true as well and indeed, as Orlando is traumatized to learn in the central episode: all texts are worlds, alive with their own internal energies, an equally troubling idea for a character banking on the fixity of his narrative. The facts of Angelica and Medoro's elopement become a text, which he reads and rereads providing alternative explanations. But the enormity, inexhaustibility and ever-expanding nature of this text becomes a physical, spatial world that Orlando can only react to non-rationally. Orlando — like the author and his contemporary readers, as Jane Tylus has argued — is simply too late for this world, which evolves rapidly with novel political and social fictions.²⁶¹ Whatever the political message of the central scene, the metaliterary import of the elision of the forest with the poem itself is clear: the chivalric romance genre, when making use of the forces of forests and randomness, is an ecology that will accept political and poetic influence but ultimately write itself.

That this central episode is set in a text-covered forest is evidence of the last of Ariosto's three strategies of aligning his act of narration with the forest ecology. While the

²⁶¹ See "The Curse of Babel", 154-155.

episode displays the two strategies discussed above, in that it is marked by passages into and out of the woods and is perpetuated through random encounters with animals, environments, and other humans, the carved trees and rocks also literalize the unity of text with forest, presenting the very verses of the poem as quotations of the forest, visually indistinct from the narrator's voice in sixteenth-century readings. The effect of these inscriptions on the first readers of the *Furioso* can be grasped by examining these passages in their printed editions, following stanzas of diegesis without any signal that the voice is not the narrator's but the stone's and tree's. As with readers of Dante's infernal inscriptions, a reader of an unremarkable copy from 1535 (**figure 5**) would have no typographical clues to separate the narrator's voice (*OF* 23.103-107 and 23.110-112) from Medoro's inscriptions in an entrance to a cave (23.108-109).²⁶²

²⁶² The folio reproduced here is from *Orlando furioso di messer Lodovico Ariosto con la giunta [...]*, ed. Lodovico Dolce (Venice: Maffeo Pasini, 1535), 117r.

Angelica e Medor con cento nodi
legati insieme, e in cento lochi vede.
quante lettere son; tanti son chiodi,
coi quali Amore il cor gli piúge e fiede.
va col pensier cercando in mille modi
non creder q̄l, ch'al suo dispetto crede.
ch'altra Angelica sia creder si sforza;
c'habbia scritto il suo nōe i q̄lla scorza.

Liete piante, verdi herbe, limpide acque,
spelica opaca, e di fredde ombre grata;
doue la bella Angelica, che nacque
di Galafron, da molti in vano amata;
spesso ne le mie braccia nuda giacque,
de la commodita che qui me data;
io pouero Medor ricompensarui
d'altro nō posso, ch' d'ognor lodarui.

Poi dice, Conosco io pur queste note:
di tal io n'ho tante vedute e lette.
finger questo Medoro ella si puote:
forse ch'a me questo cognome mette.
con tali opinion dal ver remote,
vlando fraude a se medesimo, stete
ne la speranza il mal contēto Orlando;
che si seppe a se stesso ir procacciando.

E di pregare ogni Signore Amante,
e Cauallieri, e Damigelle, e ognuna
persona, o paesana, o viandante,
che qui sua volonta meni o Fortuna,
ch'all herbe all'ōbre all'ātro al rio alle
dica, Bēigno habbiate e sole, e lūa (piate
z dele Hymphe il choro, che pueggia
che nō p̄duca a voi pastor mai greggia.

Ma sempre piu racende e piu rinnoua;
quanto sp̄ger piu cerca, il rio sospetto;
come l' incauto augel, che si ritroua
in ragna o in visco hauer dato di petto;
quanto piu batte l'ale e piu si proua
di disbrigar; piu vi si lega stretto.
Orlando viene, oue s' incurua il monte
a guisa d'arco in su la chiara fonte.

Era scritto in Arabico; che'l Conte
intendea cosi ben, comelatino.
fra molte ligue e molte, e' hauea prōte;
prontissima hauea quella il Paladino,
e gli schiudò piu volte e danni, z onte;
che si trouò tra il popul Saracino.
ma nō si vanti se gia n'ebbe frutto;
ch'ū dāno hor n'ba, ch' puo scōtargli il
(tutto.

Haueano in sul'entrata il luogo adorno
coi piedi storti Hedere e viti erranti.
quiui soleano al piu cocente giorno
stare abbracciati i duo felici amanti.
v'haueāo in omi lor dētro e d'itorno;
piu che in altro de i luoghi circostati;
scritti: qual cō carbone, e qual cō gesso;
e qual con punte di coltelli impresso.

Tre volte, e quattro, e sei lesse lo scritto
quello infelice; e pur cercando in vano
che non vi fosse quel, che v'era scritto;
e sempre lo vedea piu chiaro e piano:
z ogni volta in mezo il petto afflutto
stringersi il cor sentia con fredda mano.
rimase al fin con gliocchi e cō la mente
fūssi nel falso, al falso indifferente.

Il mesto Conte a pie quiui discese:
e vide in su l'entrata de la grotta
parole assai; che di sua man disse
Medoro hauea, ch' pareā scritte all'hot
Sl grā piacer ch' ne la grotta prese, (ta.
questa sententia in versi hauea ridotta;
ch' fosse culta i suo linguaggio io p̄sio;
z era ne la nostra tale il senso.

Fu allhora per vscir del sentimento;
si tutto in preda del dolor si lascia.
ordete a chi n'ba fatto esperimento;
che q̄sto è'l duol, ch' tutti gli altri passa,
caduto gliera sopra il petto il mento:
la frōe priua di baldanza e bassa: (to)
ne pote hauer (che'l duol l'occupò tā,
alle querelle voce o humore al pianto.

Figure 5: Folio from 1535 printing of the *Furioso*

As with other instances where the narration of the poem is performed by elements within it — as in Merlin's prophecy or the *Furioso's* various embedded tales — these verses within verses invite a metaliterary investigation. Indeed, the entire episode is a representation

of reading, from Orlando's philological desperation to explain Angelica's handwriting to his attempts to erase the text to suit his own needs. The metaliterary insight most relevant to this study is the unification within the forest of three narrative strategies: the delineation of episodes, the generation of narrative action and the ultimate presentation of the text itself. Such an invention derives from the inherent material connections between texts and the mineral materials through which they are transmitted, among the oldest of which are wood and stone. As Rensselaer Lee demonstrates, Ariosto's carved trees have a long literary legacy, its most prominent antecedent being Ovid's *Heroides*,²⁶³ so the originality of the episode is again found not in the material itself but in its being reused for new literary ambitions. While ironizing the idyllic trope of erotic engravings by making it the catalyst for Orlando's breakdown, this scene also affects a complete overlap of the textual form and the forest environment. In this clearing, Orlando has entered the realm of literature, not only because he encounters a narrative propagated by a complex chain of interactions between animals and forces in the forest but also because this narrative is actually recounted by the very elements of this environment. While this entrance of Orlando's has implications for the generic character of the poem — Jane Tylus argues it mirrors the poet's self-conscious misappropriation of epic furniture to critique literary tendencies incommensurate with contemporaneous political reality²⁶⁴ — it also encapsulates the prioritization the *Furioso* gives to the systems of its operation rather than the ultimate ends of its plots.

Zigzags and Metaliterary Design

A final confirmation of these implicit metaliterary links between the forest settings and the *Furioso* itself can be found by comparing other images with which the narrator explicitly

²⁶³ *Names on Trees: Ariosto into Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 9-11.

²⁶⁴ "The Curse of Babel", 157-159 and 168.

describes his work. Do these other, more official metaphors communicate the same ecological character as the forest? The most famous self-identification is that of the tapestry, which recurs three times in the *Furioso*, first as a pause in a highly dramatic moment at sea:

Or a poppa, or all'orza hann'il crudele,
che mai non cessa, e vien più ognor crescendo:
essi di qua di là con umil vele
vansi aggirando, e l'alto mar scorrendo.
Ma perché varie fila a varie tele
uopo mi son, che tutte ordire intendo,
lascio Rinaldo e l'agitata prua,
e torno a dir di Bradamante sua (*OF* 2.30).

A later transition away from Bradamante is ascribed to the variety built into the narrator's labor: "Di molte fila esser bisogno parme / a condur la gran tela ch'io lavoro" (*OF* 13.81). A similar excuse recurs later when the narrator states he needs to be "tornando al lavor che vario ordisco, / ch'a molti, lor mercé, grato esser suole" (*OF* 22.3). The metaphor is present in the very word text that, like the Tuscan word "testo", derives from the Latin "textus", "woven" and poets from Ovid to Dante to Petrarca have used tapestries as a metaphor for their own text.²⁶⁵ As a metaphor for Ariosto's text, the tapestry represents a grand ensemble of characters and situations none more important than the other. As a metaphor for the narrative act, though, it emphasizes not the epic whole depicted by a tapestry's obverse but instead the practice of handling different threads best perceived from the reverse. Indeed, this elegant image for Ariosto's poetics of *entrelacement* only emerges as a justification for the interruption of storylines that frustrated both character and reader alike. The tapestry serves the *Furioso* as a model for establishing unity through the discordant combination of its episodic elements. It is even, as the narrator himself declares, a model that frustrates its own

²⁶⁵ See *Metamorphoses* 6.1-96 in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3rd ed., tr. Frank Justus Miller, ed. George Patrick Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); see also *Purg.* 13.43-45 and *RVF* 40.1-2. On Ariosto's reception of these metaphors see Looney, *Compromising the Classics*, 91-109.

weaver, who is presented repeatedly as a *poeta artifex* executing a predetermined narrative design rather than a godlike creator who starts from scratch.²⁶⁶

By apologizing for the practice of interlacing the threads of his narrative tapestry, Ariosto communicates the essentially frustrating character of his poem. Readers of the multiple self-descriptive metaphors of the *Furioso* can recognize their own frustration watching the tapestry get woven as similar to the frustration the protagonists experience in the forest. More characteristic than any other aspect of forest travel is the regularity with which characters are thrown off their predetermined path and deposited in fortuitous places. Readers of the tapestry and protagonists in the tapestry alike expect straightforward narrative progression but find themselves thwarted by the interrupting force of the system itself: the underlying design according to which the weaver-poet must alternate between threads and the impositions of the forest ecosystem, its terrain and the forces of *caso* that govern it, which together move characters from one path to another. The path again represents the poem's inclusive frustration, the thwarted promise that characters — and readers — will continue on to their expected destination. Rereading the tapestry metaphor in light of the arguments presented about the forest here, the underlying design that dictates the frustrating alternation of storylines can be seen to mark a similar trajectory of frustration.

The equally famous metaphor of the naval voyage that closes the *Furioso* betrays the same indirect, frustrated trajectory as those traced by characters waylaid in the forest. The opening of the final canto presents the sailor-poet as a plaything to the dieties who have kept him lost at sea for so long:

Or, se mi mostra la mia carta il vero,
non è lontano a discoprirsi il porto;

²⁶⁶ On the limited divinity of the narrator of the *Furioso* see Robert Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 130-132.

si che nel lito i voti scioglier spero
a chi nel mar per tanta via m'ha scorto;
ove, o di non tornar col legno intero,
o d'errar sempre, ebbi già il viso smorto (*OF* 46.1).

Though both the sailor and the deities refer back to the author himself, the distinction recognizes two distinct aspects of narrative activity: the extratextual divinity who envisions the dynamics according to which the poetic world will unfold and the hapless narrator who follows their dictates, literally following them on his map. The narrator's passage on the map is like the complicated design of the tapestry: each itinerary resembles the forest ecosystem of the *Furioso*, a spaghetti junction of interrupted paths and crossroads.

The *Furioso* always follows a *movimento a zig zag*, in the words of Italo Calvino whose 1972 novel *Le città invisibili*, written a few years before his radio commentary on the poem, arranges lapidary travel narratives in familiarly Ariostean similar diagonals, evident in Carolyn Springer's visualization of the sequence (**figure 6**).²⁶⁷ The settings of the *Città invisibili* are highly suggestive of the *Furioso* as well, such as the city of Zobeide where the inhabitants are trapped chasing an imaginary naked woman or the city of Eudossia that is only mapped in a tapestry:

A Eudossia, che si estende in alto e in basso, con vicoli tortuosi, scale, angiporti, catapecchie, si conserva un tappeto in cui puoi contemplare la vera forma della città. A prima vista nulla sembra assomigliare meno a Eudossia che il disegno del tappeto, ordinato in figure simmetriche che ripetono i loro motivi lungo linee rette e circolari, intessuto di gugliate dai colori splendenti, l'alternarsi delle cui trame puoi seguire lungo tutto l'ordito. Ma se ti fermi a osservarlo con attenzione, ti persuadi che a ogni luogo del tappeto corrisponde un luogo della città e che tutte le cose contenute nella città sono comprese nel disegno, disposte secondo i loro veri rapporti, quali sfuggono al tuo occhio distratto dall'andirivieni dal brulichio dal pigia-pigia. Tutta la confusione di Eudossia, i tagli dei muli, le macchie di nerofumo, l'odore di pesce, è quanto appare nella prospettiva parziale che tu cogli; ma il tappeto prova che c'è un punto dal quale la città

²⁶⁷ Carolyn Springer, "Textual Geography: The Role of the Reader in *Invisible Cities*", *Modern Language Studies* 15.4 (1985): 289-299, 299.

mostra le sue vere proporzioni, lo schema geometrico implicito in ogni suo minimo dettaglio.²⁶⁸

After meditating on the navigational and representative possibilities of the tapestry, the novella concludes that

la vera mappa dell'universo sia la città d'Eudossia così com'è, una macchia che dilaga senza forma, con vie tutte a zig-zag, case che franano una sull'altra nel polverone, incendi, urla nel buio.²⁶⁹

The dominant interest in the *Città invisibili*, as in the travel narratives of Marco Polo upon which Calvino bases his novel, is not in congratulating the reader with a straightforward chorography but an in investigating the elusive hidden logic of systems, be they geographic or narrative, and the mention of “vie tutte a zig-zag” unmistakably attributes the same interest to the *Furioso*.

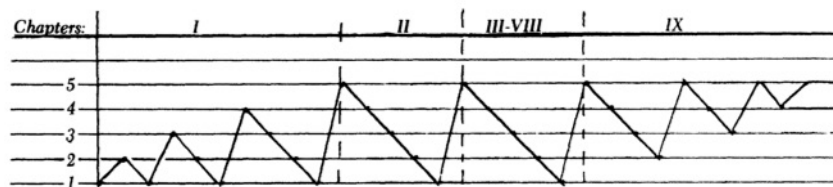


Figure 6: Carolyn Springer's visualization of the *Città invisibili*

So if the paths, the maps and the design of the tapestry all coincide in the representation of the frustrated progression that characterizes the literary experience of the *Furioso*, what then can be said of the poetic gods that oversee these interrupted trajectories? That is, if what Umberto Eco would have called the *intentio operis*,²⁷⁰ the demands of the literary text represented in this sailing metaphor by the gods, might there be corresponding hierarchies overseeing the tapestry and forest travel? In the tapestry, the underlying design represents the macronarrative pattern that will be followed by the narrator. The weaver-poet

²⁶⁸ The novella of Zobeide corresponds to “Le città e il desiderio. 5.”; see Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), 45-46. Eudossia is “Le città e il cielo. 1.”, in *Città invisibili*, 97-98.

²⁶⁹ “Le città e il cielo. 1.”, in Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, 98.

²⁷⁰ See “Overinterpreting Texts”, 63-66.

follows the design of the tapestry just as the sailor-poet follows the dieties' predetermined itinerary on his map, each presenting in their own way the bifurcation of the metaliterary and operative aspects of narrative poetry. Who are the gods of the forest, then? Besides supernatural characters like Melissa who enjoy a higher level of locomotive agency in the forest, the force that is most consistently named as the motivation for frustrated travel in the woods is randomness. In the examples discussed above, *caso* has acted in the role of the macronarrative inventor, deciding which encounters would be most effective in throwing the characters' straightforward trajectories off course. *Caso* is also aligned with divine forces, as is seen in the two Fortunes in the first canto and in Medoro's prayer to the moon. Similarly, divine agents in the *Furioso* like the archangel Michael (in *OF* 27.34-38) and John the Vangelist (in cantos 34-35) act as movers of characters just like the autonomous animal guides through the forest. The alignment between gods and natural forces reflects the widespread understanding in Christian Europe of *Natura* as the executor of divine will: while the divine creator designed and organized the world, *Natura* animates these forms and dictates the laws of their interactions.²⁷¹ The preoccupation of the *Furioso* with randomness as an animating factor in a world populated with animalistic characters, following otherwise straightforward itineraries, demonstrates the poem's awareness of the ecology of its narrative.

While the poem for the most part retains its secular character — even its overt treatments of Christianity include equivocations, as in the confession by John the Vangelist that sacred texts are in part artful narratives (*OF* 34.58) — its godlessness does not invalidate the rich cosmology proposed by the ecologically determined interactions that make up much of its action. Nor does the ultimate alignment between the gods and associated metaphysical

²⁷¹ On *Natura* see Curtius, *Europäische Literatur*, 114-135.

forces and the author himself demand that Ariosto be seen as the puppetmaster described in so much contemporary criticism.²⁷² Instead, the discussion of each of his major metaphorical images for his own poem present a bifurcation of authorial agency. The tapestry is produced by a weaver following a design, the sailor charts the voyage drawn for him by the gods and *caso* reunites characters whose instinctive reactions the narrator has merely installed. If the author is the closest party associated with divinity in the poem, that association can only be partial, as the metaliterary metaphors consistently represent the act of narrating as a cooperation between the metanarrative and operative halves of the author. The same cooperation can be felt in the overt narratological admissions throughout the *Furioso*, as when the author closes cantos for the comfort of the reader or breaks spatial or chronological coherence to present information in a more logical sequence. Similar compromises can be read into the poem's historicity, the political need to lionize a dynasty viewed by Ariosto and his contemporaries as plagued by decadence and illegitimacy.²⁷³ In any case, the narratology that emerges from overt and metaphorical descriptions of the poem present a literary ecology, where the determinants built into the design of the work dictate its unfolding and where not even the divine author exerts complete control over a narrative process, one that involves readers and patrons, literary traditions and forms.

A third metaliterary construction of the *Furioso*, the enchanted castles of Atlante, furthers its non-linear identity. Though never explicitly likened to the poem itself, the labyrinthine prisons where characters chase simulacra of the desires that governed their

²⁷² See for example, Durling, *The Figure of the Poet*, 112-181; see also Donald Selwyn Carne-Ross, "The One and the Many: A Reading of Orlando Furioso, Cantos 1 and 8", *Arion* 5.2 (1966): 195-234.

²⁷³ On the *Furioso* and historical concerns over the legitimacy of the ruling d'Este family see Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando furioso* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 72-81. See also Pina Palma, *Savoring Power, Consuming the Times: The Metaphors of Food in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 237-244.

motion outside the castle have been held as miniatures of the *Furioso*'s complex of desire-driven narratives.²⁷⁴ Intent on delaying the conversion and marriage that would complete Ruggiero's destiny — and conclude the second-most important plotline in the poem — Atlante has been read as a figure for the poet. But as with the tapestry and the narrator's sea voyage, Atlante's castles also represent a poetics where the singularity of the Ruggiero's narrative is counteracted by the plurality and vitality of other characters, both inside and outside their enchanted walls. Ruggiero is merely the most important creature in of a host of hypnotized heroes moving on their own itineraries and the metaliterary effect of the castle derives more from the presence of multiple miniature narratives rather than merely from Atlante's detention of Ruggiero. But Bradamante, motivated not by enchantment but by social determinants — such as the professional allegiance calling her back to the battlefield and the familial bond that demands she help her cousin — disrupts Atlante's designs in the same way the vitality of character designed with unswervable impulses can disrupt a preordained narrative structure. Atlante's closed systems, a symbol of the poem's Boiardan inheritance,²⁷⁵ are bested by Ariosto's more open ecology.

When seen together, these narrative metaphors reveal more than they appear to within their context. Beyond the individual configuration of the text each interjection presents, together they beg the question, why so many metaphors? Indeed, the tendency spills into the critical approaches taken to the *Furioso*, seen as early as Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio's 1554 description of the poem as a "Camaleonte, che come egli di quella cosa prende il colore, alla quale si appoggia" and continued with Sapegno, Calvino, Bologna and even the present thesis that the *Furioso* presents itself through its forests, which themselves are already texts,

²⁷⁴ For a standard reading see Donato, "Per Selve e Boscherecci Labirinti".

²⁷⁵ See Quint, "The Figure of Atlante," 80-87.

matrices of literary possibility.²⁷⁶ So what is it about the *Furioso* that calls out for so much descriptive definition? The very act of definition indicates a need to confine the text to one conceptualization. But the *Furioso*'s plurality of metaphors undermines the sincerity of each individual one: the poem promises to be a tapestry, a map, a path, music and its critics are inspired to definite it as a machine, an organism, a chessboard, a world. The *Furioso* seems to be like each of these but fails to truly be exhaustively described by any one. What, then, is the essence common to all of these? What seems to have at once beautiful order, expanding space, abundant vitality, a vivid past and future, an incalculable circus of interactions between humans, animals, plants and the furthest reaches of the terrestrial universe? This study proposes the non-metaphorical assertion that the poem is an ecology, compatible with all of these metaphors, and that Ariosto's own awareness of this likeness is legible in the dead center of the poem, in the forest, the most formative environment in the poem. That metaliterary moments such as the opening, closing and central episodes should so visibly align their forest with a narrative self-awareness only reflects Ariosto's choice to single out the forest as particularly representative of the ecology of the *Furioso*.



As with the three other works treated in this dissertation, the *Orlando furioso* invites the interpretation that its forests stand for the text itself. Indeed, this reading of the central episode of the poem, in which the protagonist Orlando finds news of his beloved's elopement inscribed in the trees, may be so apparent that its significance is lost to readers interested in

²⁷⁶ Cinzio's letter, dated 1554 and included in an untitled pamphlet now at the British Museum 11826.d.42, is cited in Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 959. For context on the Cinzio Giraldi's letter, see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 433.

the work's metaliterary program.²⁷⁷ But the identification of the poem with the forest demands to be understood as a profound exposition of the poem's essence as a narrative ecology dominated not by a divine force but instead by randomness. Such a notion is already at work in the text itself, a text that self-consciously derives its action from expedients generated by constructed environments, such as the elaborate natural phenomena that bring Medoro and Angelica together. At the root of this and other plotlines in the poem, *caso* emerges as the determining factor.

What might this ecology of haphazard activity mean with respect to the literary history of the forest? The classical motif of the forest as site of encounters with the divine is effectively revised with an author, in the place of the divine, who hides behind the narrative energies a poem beyond his control. While this raises questions about the philosophy of the literary composition Ariosto entertained — and its possible Lucretian inspiration — it no doubt derives from a long tradition of associations between the forest, randomness and the practice of storytelling. To embrace randomness as a major influence in the ecology of the *Furioso*, then, is to reveal these connections and their importance to the story itself, fundamentally untellable without the narrative generativity of the forest. So while the forest of the *Furioso* can be imagined to literalize the literary potentialities of the forest, visible in the more naked moments of romance, such as in *Yvain* or the *Innamoramento*, the same space provides structures that the poet will find analogous to his own craft. That is, if the reader of Chrétien and Boiardo's works intuits that their narrators posit the forest as the space of the story, the reader of Ariosto's poem should see both the title character and narrator aware of such metaliterary potential. The rhetoric of navigating forest roads spills over into

²⁷⁷ For example, Jane Tylus, in "Curse of Babel," 156-157, does not need to identify the metaliterary plane of this scene, but interprets immediately it as an epic hero seeking to destroy a romance container.

the self-referential moments of narration in the *Furioso* and the *Cinque canti* as the narrator struggles against the agency of his material.

Ariosto's metaphors, like those of his critics and like the metaphor proposed by the present study, grapple with the self-definition of the poem and the uneasiness of the control the narrator is expected to exert over his material. Readers encounter a narrative voice that is unmistakably omnipresent yet perpetually struggling against the excess of disorganized content or the limitations of the poetic form, suggesting pressure from a system of constraints that checks and influences the narrator's agency. Recognizing this character of the poem leads readers to the metaphor of the central episode likening the forest to the poem that contains it. To argue that the *Furioso* is the forest not only reveals much about the operation of the work as a self-aware literary ecology but also proposes that the *Furioso* as a piece of literature that needs constant metaphorization, as though one definition could not suffice or cannot approximate its varied nature. No one metaphor could enfold the whole system, not even the synesthetic tapestry of Eudossia, for it would need to include the poet, his court, his readers and editors, the hundreds of characters and etiologies inherited from literary tradition, the demands of *ottava rima* and canto length, its own poetic ambitions and even historical developments, like the "nuovo mondo" that is written into the 1532 edition after the first colonial expeditions seeped into the European popular imagination.²⁷⁸ The metaphor would also need to include the agency, however invisible, also derived from the topography, biology and narrative exploitability of forest that collaborate on a whole greater than any author's intended parts. The agency of the forest setting must now be considered a

²⁷⁸ On the *Furioso* and early colonial exploration see Piero Boitani, *L'ombra di Ulisse* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 65-66. See also Theodore Cachey Jr., "Maps and Literature in Renaissance Italy", in John Brian Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987-2015), 3:450-460, 3:456-460.

constituent part of the *Furioso*'s production, thereby offering one answer to the central question of this dissertation, namely, how landscapes help tell stories.

In the tradition of the literary identification with the forest that begins with Dante and Petrarca's understanding of the environment as a symbol and continues into a more generative role in the production of narrative, Ariosto, then, undertakes a more complex exploration of the potential for the forest to be a truly textual world, not merely a space within which to generate and catch a narrative. While Boccaccio enters the forest just to come out the other side with a good story, Ariosto forestalls ever leaving, delighting in all its crossroads. When he attempts to write a more linear narrative, the grim *Cinque canti*, the forest is cut down, leaving traces of its potential for the more lively and pluralistic poetic world to which the poet will return in the expanded edition of 1532. Torquato Tasso, the son of the poet who followed Ariosto at the court of the d'Este family, will see in the forest of the *Furioso* a dangerous ecosystem where linear and moral trajectories get thwarted and will devise a highly teleological topography where the forest is restricted to the sole purpose of construction. As the next chapter explores, Tasso's chivalric poem will harness the narrative potential of the forest that Boccaccio highlights and that Ariosto explodes by restricting the ecology of the forest setting to its most inert materialist, prop-like essence but will also realize that the consequences of fencing in an ecology as rich as that of the *Furioso* can be quite serious.

Chapter 4: What's the Matter with the *Liberata*?²⁷⁹

“Every word was once a poem”
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Poet*²⁸⁰



How can the forest help tell a story? The earliest romances to emerge in Western Europe all depend on the narrative opportunities offered by this dark and innavigable landscape, full of wild animals and outlaws. In the late twelfth-century *Yvain* by Chrétien de Troyes, for example, the protagonist spends half the poem in the woods chasing one adventure after another but eventually retires for the comforts of married life at court where such adventures are only possible through narrative recreation. The forest of *Yvain* stands in for the story itself: it is a space that generates one episode after another but that also guarantees its own conclusion, since characters in most Western narratives go into the woods only to leave once the story is resolved.²⁸¹ But this not so in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, as the previous chapter has detailed: the poem so exploits the potential of the forest setting to generate plot developments that it is made to narrate the central episode (*OF* 23.100-114). Ariosto's invention depends not only on the symbiosis between the forest and the romance genre but also on a long history of intersections between conceptions of the forest and the practice of writing. Printed in 1532, the final edition of the *Furioso* thus demonstrates perhaps the most overt awareness of the narrative potential of the forest in the Italian literary canon thus far.

²⁷⁹ Portions of this chapter develop research published as “Naming Trees in the *Gerusalemme liberata*”, *Romance Studies* 31.3-4 (2013): 139-151.

²⁸⁰ See “The Poet”, 209, in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012), 197-222.

²⁸¹ One exception to this limitation is the hermit narrative, which occupies only a small corner of early modern Italian fiction. For the relationship between forests and hermitage practice in the West, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 47-59.

That is, until the son of one of Ariosto's successors at the ducal palace of Ferrara challenged the entire genre of narrative poetry, a challenge legible in his poem's use of the forest setting. A prolific if uninspired poet and theorist, Bernardo Tasso spent time in Ferrara in the service of Renée of France before Ariosto's death in 1533 and later helped secure a position for his son Torquato in the court of Alfonso II d'Este, Renée's son.²⁸² The ten most stable years of Torquato's unquiet life were spent at the d'Este court, which he fled in 1577 after assaulting a servant, and during that decade he had already drafted the works that would most contribute to the critical debate over vernacular narrative poetry: a treatise on poetic composition and a narrative poem that not only exemplifies all its precepts but, as this chapter will argue, dramatizes them as well.²⁸³ Diverging significantly from its predecessors, the chivalric narrative Tasso envisions is a *poema eroico* that would obey the rules of classical composition in fashion among Italian literati. Written by 1575, printed in Ferrara in 1581 under the title *Gerusalemme liberata* and revised extensively until 1593, Tasso's poem was compared to Ariosto's from its very appearance and polarized the academic "quarrel" over the merits and function of narrative poetry, already confused by contradictory and sometimes irrelevant signals from ancient literary theory, more recent vernacular literature, counter-Reformation anxieties and family politics.²⁸⁴

The differences between the two poems are ubiquitous but are nowhere more visible than in their forests. The episodic adventures of the *Furioso* are often born from random encounters along forest thoroughfares and that setting predictably overlaps with the

²⁸² On the life and career of Bernardo Tasso see Umberto Bosco, "Tasso, Bernardo", in Umberto Bosco, gen. ed., *Enciclopedia italiana* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1937), available at treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/enciclopedia_italiana. The authoritative biography on Torquato is Angelo Solerti's *Vita di Torquato Tasso* (Turin: Loescher, 1895).

²⁸³ On the dating of the *Gerusalemme liberata* see Solerti, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, 1:200-351. On the dating of the *Discorsi* see Poma, "Nota filologica", 262-268.

²⁸⁴ Bernard Weinberg details the contemporary debates over literary worth in his chapters on the "quarrel" over the narrative poetry; see *A History of Literary Criticism*, 954-1073.

interstitial moments of narrative perpetuation and transition. As the previous chapter proposed, the *Furioso* imagines itself as a poem designed in part by the rhythms and topography of the forest and such a metaliterary identification reveals a poetics of randomness and design, imagined as a path zigzagging through the forest. As this chapter will detail, Tasso's *Liberata* instead embraces a poetics of instrumentalization, where an exacting godlike poet realizes the Christian potential of literary material. The forest exemplifies this dynamic, by narrating the poem's most fundamental storyline — the search for *materia*, lumber — in a vocabulary lifted from the literary treatise Tasso was drafting at the same time, a treatise in which the act of poetry is likened to both carpentry and the metaphysical shaping of matter. This study will argue that the relatively restricted presence of the forest in Tasso's chivalric poem owes its relationship to the treatise on that genre, in which the forest exemplifies those traits of the romance — obscenity, sacrilege, individuality, centrifuge — most problematic to poetic and spiritual orthodoxy. Tasso thus employs the characteristic setting selectively to serve the aims of his instrumental poetics. In transforming the forest from the incarnation most familiar to Tasso's contemporary readers, the dynamic space of Ariostean adventure, into a disenchanting lumberyard of narrative and moral potential, the *Liberata* presents a metaliterary narrative that dramatizes the construction of the heroic poem out of the dangerous *ῥῆμα* of romance.

Materia, the term with which Tasso often refers to the building materials sought from the woods, echoes the vocabulary he employs in a roughly contemporaneous poetic treatise to describe subject matter, also *materia*, which gets shaped into a *favola* just as wood is worked into a boat. His woodworking metaphors invite a rereading of the lumber plotline in the *Liberata* as a dramatization of the compositional theory he spells out in this treatise, the

Arte poetica — drafted by 1566, revised in 1574 and published in 1587 — because each text espouses a teleology of instrumentalization: the shipbuilding and smithery metaphors in the *Arte poetica*, together with the war machines in the *Liberata*, make instruments of its parts in carefully designed literary operations. The poetics behind these inventions is founded on Tasso's totalizing reading of Aristotle, incorporating the philosopher's thought not just on poetry but also on metaphysics and material generation. The forest and its *materia* become a keyhole onto an arc of instrumentalization that undergirds the entire poem and creates a further link between the theory and practice of Tasso's intricately devised poetics. But while the forest of the *Liberata* dramatizes the poem's obedience to the theoretical program behind the *Arte poetica*, the trees cut down at the Crusaders' arrival, among them a family of "tassi", (*GL* 3.76) individually testify to the cost of such a commitment. In particular, trees become named funerary monuments, each in a way that demonstrates the death afforded to characters and authors alike by the poet's absolute adherence to literary orthodoxy. Thus the forest construction in the *Liberata* not only confirms the poem's obedient relationship to Tasso's literary theory by restaging the instrumentalization of narrative *materia* but, in episodes that name its victims, Tasso also poignantly critiques his commitment as well.

Tasso's Literary Materialism

To fully understand the ideas at work in Tasso's poetic and theoretical writings, it may first be useful to introduce the texts themselves and their long editorial history. Torquato begins composing chivalric poetry under the supervision of his father Bernardo Tasso, a court poet whose hundred-canto *Amadigi* eventually took on a decidedly Ariostean style.²⁸⁵ Torquato's first foray into the chivalric genre is the incomplete *Gierusalemme*, drafted between 1559-

²⁸⁵ For Torquato's experience watching his father revise the *Amadigi* see Michael Sherberg, "Introduzione", in Torquato Tasso, *Rinaldo*, ed. Michael Sherberg (Ravenna: Longa, 1990), 9-36, 23-24.

1560, a text which he will begin elaborating into an epic after composing a separate chivalric exercise, the nine-canto *Rinaldo* begun in 1561 and published the following year.²⁸⁶ A full version of the poem recognized today as the *Liberata* had been circulating in manuscript between 1575 and 1577, while Tasso was at work preparing a more conservative version for print. This earlier, supposedly unedited version finds its way to the scholar Febo Bonnà, with whom Tasso eventually collaborates on the first authorized printing of the so-called *Liberata*, while his preferred title, the *Gerusalemme conquistata*, graces the extensive revision published in 1593.²⁸⁷

The publication of the *Conquistata* brings a close to nearly two decades of Tasso's defenses of his own poem and rewrites and even deletes problematic elements in evident response to his critics.²⁸⁸ But Tasso's unease with the reception and worth of his poem first manifests in the *Allegoria del poema* that Tasso he in 1575.²⁸⁹ Published as an afterward in Bonnà's 1581 edition, the reading assured readers that the entirety of the poem "altro non significa che" an overarching allegory of the Christian body preparing to contemplate the divine, presumably to preempt accusations of religious heterodoxy.²⁹⁰ Similar preoccupations pepper the collection of editorial communications — written between March 1575 and July

²⁸⁶ For the dating of the *Gierusalemme*, see Antonio di Pietro, *Il "Gierusalemme" nella storia della poesia tassiana* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1951), 9. On the *Rinaldo* see Solerti, 1:42-50.

²⁸⁷ On Tasso's preferred title see Marziano Guglielminetti, "Torquato Tasso: la vita · profilo storico-critico dell'autore e dell'opera · guida bibliografica", in Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. Marziano Guglielminetti (Bologna: Garzanti, 1974), v-xliv, xxxi; see also Solerti, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, 1:331-332.

²⁸⁸ On the relationship of the *Conquista* to the *Liberata* see Claudio Gigante, *Vincer parimenti più sé stessa antica: La Gerusalemme conquistata nel mondo poetico di Torquato Tasso* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1996).

²⁸⁹ The *Allegoria* is mentioned in letters as early as 1575; see Lucia Olini, "Dalle direzioni di lettura alla rivisione del testo: Tasso tra *Allegoria del poema* e *Giudizio*", *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 89.1 (1985): 53-68, 56.

²⁹⁰ The prescription recurs four times ("[...] altro non sono che [...]", "[...] altro non significano che [...]", "[...] altro non è [...]", "[...] altro non significa [...]") in the *Allegoria*; see the *Allegoria della Gerusalemme liberata*, in *Le prose diverse di Torquato Tasso*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1875), 1:297-308.

1576 and published in June 1587 as the *Lettere poetiche del Sig. Torquato Tasso*²⁹¹ — in which Tasso details the preparation of the *Liberata* manuscript to his editors and recur in the many defenses he writes of his poem, such as the 1585 *Apologia*, a dialogue in which a Forestiere, Tasso's double from earlier dialogues, responds to dog-eared passages of critiques recited by his Segretario. Discernable even from this abbreviated history, then, is the extent to which the *Gerusalemme liberata* and its paratexts conspicuously conform to the contemporaneous norms of literary esteem.

And by the second half of the sixteenth century, poetic worth in Italy was judged by one rubric above all others: the principles of unity Aristotle set forth in the *Poetics*, his only systematic work on literary practice. This work was generally unknown to Italian scholars until Giorgio Valla's 1498 translation and achieved indisputable authority in literary circles with the series of commentaries published by 1560, a permanent influence in the company where Tasso would be educated.²⁹² Indeed, by the 1540s, an enthusiastic readership had developed and had come to misapply Aristotle's considerations on tragedy to narrative forms unknown in ancient Greece, such as the chivalric verse romance,²⁹³ as Tasso himself admits.²⁹⁴ This critical enthusiasm for Aristotle ran counter to popular tastes, which Tasso learned early on through the tepid response to an early version of his father's *Amadigi* — a

²⁹¹ For the editorial history of the *Lettere poetiche* see Carla Molinari, "Nota al testo", in Torquato Tasso, *Lettere poetiche*, ed. Carla Molinari (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda, 1995), xlv-lxxxi, xlv-lxxii.

²⁹² For the repopularization of Aristotle's *Poetics* see Eugène Napoleon Tigerstedt, "Observations on the Reception of the Aristotelian Poetics in the Latin West", *Studies in the Renaissance* 15 (1968): 7-24. For the reception of the *Poetics* in Tasso's literary circles see Lawrence Rhu, *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory: English Translations of the Poetics and a Comparative Study of Their Significance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 17-18.

²⁹³ See Javitch, "The Assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics*", 3:54-56.

²⁹⁴ See Tasso's *Apologia*, in Giovan Battista Licino, ed., *Apologia del Sig. Torquato Tasso in difesa della sua Gierusalemme liberata. Con alcune altre Opere, parte in accuse, parte in difesa dell'Orlando furioso dell'Ariosto, della Gierusalemme istessa, e dell'Amadigi del Tasso padre* (Ferrara: Cagnacini, 1585), A²r-G⁴r [of non-continuous signatures], A⁵r. For the dating of the *Apologia*, see Solerti, 1:421-422.

misfortune Michael Sherberg suggests Bernardo recounted often to the young Torquato²⁹⁵ — and later in the outright rejection of Giangiorgio Trissino’s “stillborn” *Italia liberata dai goti*.²⁹⁶ In his writings about the poem, Torquato Tasso appears determined to prove that Aristotelian orthodoxy can attract a public steeped in romance and puts this theoretical devotion into practice at a very young age. Begun between 1562 and 1566 — as early as the age of seventeen — but only published in 1587, after the publication of the *Liberata*, the *Discorsi dell’Arte Poetica et in particolare del Poema Heroico* proposes a form of poetry that expresses Christian morality through the norms of classical composition, including those established in Aristotle’s *Poetics*.²⁹⁷ Tasso will likewise revise these discourses into a set of six discourses where the three classical modes of composition — *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocution* — are given twice the space to treat heroic poetry.

Though currently available evidence does not support more precise dating, it is agreed that at least by 1566 the *Discorsi* was at least “sotto forma di ideazione e di primo organico abbozzo”²⁹⁸ and it should be assumed that the fundamental system of the application of generic *forma* to narrative *materia* was present from the very inception of the treatise. Tasso thus adopts the materialist basis of the *Arte poetica* contemporaneous to — if not before — the ideation of the *Liberata*. With no trace of the treatise predating the 1574 letter where Tasso admits to revising his discourses, precise coincidences in imagery between the 1581 edition of the *Liberata* and the 1587 printing of the *Arte poetica* cannot be sourced to either of the texts.²⁹⁹ But surely a lexical coincidence at such a fundamental level of both

²⁹⁵ See Sherberg, “Introduzione”, 23-24.

²⁹⁶ The description of the *Italia liberata* appears in Robert Bell’s introduction to Henry Howard’s translation of “The Second and Fourth Books of Virgil’s *Æneid*”, in Robert Bell, ed. *Poetical Works of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey; Minor Contemporaneous Poets; and Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst* (London: Parker, 1854), 136.

²⁹⁷ For the textual history of the *Arte poetica* see Poma, “Nota filologica”, 263-270.

²⁹⁸ Poma, “Nota filologica”, 266.

²⁹⁹ For the revision of the *Arte poetica* see Poma, “Nota filologica”, 269.

texts reflects Tasso's related meditations on the dynamic of instrumentalization undergirding his literary theory and practice. The fundamental position held by the concept of *materia* in Tasso's poetics is revealed by the formulations expressed by the term in his literary treatise.

In the schematics laid out in the first book of the *Arte poetica*, the theorist dictates *materia* must be chosen from pre-existing secular or religious cultural canons. When making this choice, poets must consider the qualities of the *materia* entirely with respect to its suitability for the poetic ends: if the *materia* is too sacred the poem will offend its readers and thus not succeed as literature but if the *materia* is too comic the content will deflate or parody the heroic ambitions of the work and will thus disqualify itself from the genre. The metaphor with which Tasso ushers in this first discourse on poetic selection introduces a link between poetry and carpentry:

si come colui che fabrica le navi non solo è obligato a sapere qual debba esser la forma delle navi, ma deve anco conoscere qual maniera di legno è più atta a ricever in sé questa forma, così parimente conviene al poeta non solo aver arte nel formare la materia, ma giudizio ancora nel conoscerla; e sceglierla dee tale che sia per sua natura d'ogni perfezione capace.³⁰⁰

This inspiration underlies the entire concept of poetry that Tasso lays out in these early discourses: the unformed subject matter, *materia*, is selected for its suitability as an embodiment of the principles of the genre. The theory of form behind this vision of poetry is made clear not only by Tasso's metaphors of woodwork but also by the terminology of material perfection that will continue throughout the work, leading to the final pronouncement that without a generic form any given literary structure "Ciascuna per sé sola fa qualche effetto, chi più e chi meno[,] ma tutte insieme tanto rilevano, che senza esse non è la materia capace di perfezione".³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ *Arte poetica* 1 in Poma, ed., 3.

³⁰¹ *Arte poetica* 1 in Poma, ed., 10.

The rhetoric of suitability and aptitude reflects the syncretic influence of Aristotle, whose metaphysical thought is already on the first page of the *Arte poetica* coupled with his literary theory. Tasso's use of "materia nuda" also courts a metaphysical approach seen in other comparisons in the dialogue between narrative *materia* and the *prima materia* of materialist generation. The process of entelechy undergirds the entire formulation: the literary *materia* must be chosen for its aptitude to receive a generic form that can bring it to perfection. Tasso later exposes the Aristotelian inspiration behind his terminology:

questa che, prima che sia caduta sotto l'artificio dell'epico materia si chiama, doppo ch'è stata dal poeta disposta e trattata, e che favola è divenuta, non è più materia, ma è forma e anima del poema e tale è da Aristotele giudicata.³⁰²

But inspiration has led to revision, as this citation reflects Tasso's enthusiasm to conflate works within Aristotle's corpus. The plot as the soul of the poem: Tasso ascribes this quite remarkable formulation to Aristotle, who does assert in the *Poetics* that "Plot [...] is the first principle and, as it were [*oĩov*], soul of tragedy".³⁰³ But Aristotle's overt figure of speech here and his overall technical perspective mark this individual treatise as rather unconcerned with a metaphysics of literature. But Tasso takes Aristotle's analogy literally, as his manuscript annotation to this line from book 6.2 of Pietro Vettori's 1560 translation of the *Poetics* makes clear: "fabula est ani- / ma tragoediae et principium".³⁰⁴ This gloss condenses simile into metaphor, likeness into sameness, and represents Tasso's syncretist embrace of Aristotle's

³⁰² *Arte poetica* 1 in Poma, ed., 14.

³⁰³ *Poetics* 1450a.

³⁰⁴ Torquato Tasso, *Postille (II 1): P. Vettori, Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetarum*, ed. Marina Virgili, in *Postille*, gen. ed. Maria Teresa Girardi (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2009), 2:7-250, 2:132.

metaphysics and literary theory that diverges from the more specialized approaches to Aristotle favored in the mid sixteenth century.³⁰⁵

Tasso's assertion that *favola* is the "anima del poema" thus reflects a desire to see in the poetic process the same entelechy at work elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus. The implications of interpreting the metaphor as an equation are great. First, it conjures a sort of respect deserved by *materia* with a specific suitability, since "non è alcun dubbio che la virtù dell'arte non possa in un certo modo violentar la natura della materia".³⁰⁶ At the same time it subjugates *materia* in the teleology of its combination with form. This syncretic reading of Aristotle may have flown in the face of contemporaneous approaches to specific branches of Aristotelian thought but Tasso may have been just as positively influenced by the translations of his day, which perennially employed the Italian term *materia* to conjure Aristotelian metaphysical and poetic matter.³⁰⁷ To appreciate the valences this term came to enjoy in sixteenth-century Italian, it is necessary to trace its etymology across the various philosophical discourses to which Tasso's uses of *materia* will allude. As was more fully detailed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the Tuscan word *materia* derived from a Latin homograph that had in turn translated half of the concepts in the Greek *ύλη*, the other half of which was transmitted through the Latin *silva*, or *sylva*, and ultimately to the Italian *selva*.

The original referent of the Greek *ύλη* was unused wooden matter, as in forests and the timber found there were primarily wooden, and it often conjures either forests or lumber.

³⁰⁵ See Charles Lohr, "The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle", in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 80-98, 97-98.

³⁰⁶ *Arte poetica* 1, in Poma, ed., 4.

³⁰⁷ Tasso was familiar with the work of Philip Melanchthon, whose selective Aristotelianism excluded metaphysics; for Tasso's library see Anna Maria Carini, "I postillati 'barberiani' [sic] del Tasso", *Studi tassiani* 12 (1962): 97–110, 107. On Melanchthon's Aristotelianism see Lohr, "The Medieval Interpretation", 97. See also Heinrich Kuhn, "Aristotelianism in the Renaissance", in Edward Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2009 ed., plato.stanford.edu, §2.

An exemplary description of autumn woodcutting from the preclassical *Works and Days* employs features the noun ὕλη alongside the verb ὑλοτομεῖν, ‘to hew’:

[...] at that time, wood that is cut with the iron [τμηθεῖσα σιδήρῳ ὕλη] is least bitten by worms, and its leaves fall to the ground and it ceases putting forth shoots. So at that time be mindful and cut wood [ὑλοτομεῖν], a seasonable work [...].³⁰⁸

From these physical meanings derives the more abstract sense of building material, which in a further figurative application gets extended discursively to refer to the content of a rhetorical construction: the hapax of ὕλη in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in fact, exhibits this meaning.³⁰⁹ The Roman historian Suetonius reports the Athenian rhetorician Ateius Praetextatus orders his secretary to commend eight hundred books’ worth of “helen nostram” to posterity, a statement that presupposes the currency of ὕλη as a term for artless expository writing at least by late Republican Rome.³¹⁰ Thus those anonymous poets who Emerson might have imagined first spoke of the ‘wood’ of their conversation established a centuries-long tradition linking wood and forests to poetic subject matter, a tradition in which Tasso will figure by combining these two valences of ὕλη with a third, metaphysical extension.

Aristotle is credited as the first Greek writer to add a metaphysical valence to the term ὕλη and, indeed, it recurs frequently in his lectures on the materiality of the soul, where it signifies potential only actualizable with the impression of a proper μορφή or form.³¹¹ By adding an imbalanced interdependency between the material potentiality and the specific form that realizes its perfection through an act of entelechy, Aristotle’s recourse to ὕλη perfectly reflects his revision of the Platonic materialism. In the *Timaeus*, Plato had imagined matter as an autonomous χώρα, a receptacle or space that receives the ideal impression for a

³⁰⁸ See Hesiod, *Works and Days* 420-422.

³⁰⁹ See *Timaeus* 69a.

³¹⁰ *De grammaticis et rhetoribus* 10.

³¹¹ For the coinage see Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “ὕλη”. For ὕλη in Aristotle see, for example, *On Generation and Corruption* 1.4, *On the Soul* 2.1 and *Metaphysics* 8.1-6.

being from without.³¹² Two facets of Plato's formulation are relevant to Aristotle's approach to the same subject and more so to Tasso's reading of the later philosopher. The first is the absolute scission of space from being, as the persona of Timaeus dictates: "that which shall receive all forms [εἰδῶν] within itself must be utterly without share in any of the forms."³¹³ Such unconditional receptivity has given rise to the notion of the space as chaos but even this essential randomness betrays a definition of space as a sort of distinct autonomy: the receiving space, like scentless perfume bases, is utter lack but exists as a sort of entity by virtue of its conceivability, "itself apprehensible without sensation by a sort of bastard reasoning".³¹⁴

Aristotle's divergence from Plato's vocabulary of spaces and receptacles towards the artisan vocabulary of ὕλη replaces the autonomous identity of lack and absolute disconnection from the Being that characterized the Platonic Space with a relational nature forever dependent on a formal actualization. The Aristotelian revision of Platonic matter addresses this autonomy repeatedly: "Matter, in the chief and strictest sense of the word, is the substratum [δεκτικόν] which admits of coming-to-be and passing-away".³¹⁵ The application is quite apt and, as a microscopic metaphor, coheres perfectly with his overall teleological conception of matter: just as wood only becomes building material when there is construction in mind, so too does matter become material only in relation to a process of making. Definitions thus abound which contextualize ὕλη in a larger process of becoming, most succinctly in the pronouncement that "matter is potentiality, form actuality".³¹⁶ This ὕλη diverges from the Platonic vocabulary, then, by enacting a strict relationship to form and,

³¹² *Timaeus* 51a.

³¹³ *Timaeus* 50e.

³¹⁴ *Timaeus* 52b.

³¹⁵ Aristotle, *On Coming-to-be and Passing-Away* 320a.

³¹⁶ *On the Soul* 2.1.

consequently, by revising out its autonomous identity of lack. This matter, then, is not permeable by all formal archetypes, as it is for Plato, but tied to its formal counterpart by a sort of intentionality. As a counterpart, it trades the essential negative autonomy, the essential lack inherent in the Platonic space, for half an identity, forever codependent on form to endow it with the cohesion needed to stand in the mind as cognitive unit. For Aristotle, essentially, *ὕλη* never stands alone.

As these concepts made their way into the Latin-speaking world, the many meanings of *ὕλη* were split between the twin terms *materia* and *silva*. The word *silva* inherits the more collective senses, signifying forests, groves and foliage primarily but also thick heaps, as in the famous Vergilian thicket of arrows that both Ariosto and Tasso revise in their battle scenes.³¹⁷ *Materia*, a word bound up with the same generative processes as *mater*, acquired many of the applied meanings of *ὕλη*, both physical, as in substance or building matter, and figurative, as in occasion. The nomenclature of literary genres illustrates one difference between the two halves of *ὕλη*. Just as the first, physical meaning of *silva* lent itself to garden arrangements or entities and just as the second, metaphysical meaning of *silva* lent itself to the most substantial image of prime matter, so too does the third, discursive meaning apply the term to rough compositions, occasional poetry and unthemed poetry collections. Ateius and Lucan may have first used the term as a title but Statius more openly exploits the term for his collection of occasional poems, incorporating the rhetorician Quintilian's own definition into his prologues.³¹⁸ The unadorned subject matter of a work is usually referred to

³¹⁷ See, respectively, *Aeneid* 10.886-887, *GL* 18.76, and *OF* 18.22. Lucan, in *Pharsalia* 10.201-206, may have also influenced the Italian texts.

³¹⁸ Though Statius's compositions are more formally elaborate than as defined by the *Oratoria*, his prologues court comparison with these precepts, as they pick up the speed and heat of inspiration that Quintilian mentions, almost in returning the discursive *silva* back to its elemental qualities as matter; see Bright, *Elaborate Disarray*, 27.

as *materia*, as Quintilian demonstrates describing those writers who “primo decurrere per materiam stilo quam velocissimo volunt et sequentes calorem atque impetum ex tempore scribunt; hanc silvam vocant”.³¹⁹

A similar bifurcation appears in translating the metaphysical valences of *ὕλη* into Latin. In the first Latinizations of classical materialist texts, metaphysical matter was given routinely as *silva*. Calcidius’s fourth-century commentary on the *Timaeus* overwhelmingly prefers *silva* in its discussions of both Platonic and Aristotelian theories, marshaling that noun as a stand-alone signifier, connoting a unity or thing-like character. But readers may see Calcidius protest too much, lavishing attention on the the absence of the term *ὕλη* from the *Timaeus*:

Nunc [...] de silva tractabitur, quam originem fore rerum consentiunt Pythagorei Platonici Stoici. Nomen vero ei dederunt auditores Platonis ipse enim nusquam silvae nomen ascripsit sed aliis multis ad declarationem naturae eius convenientibus nuncupat mentis usus est, cum animis nostris intimare vellet intellectum eius utcumque, vel ex natura propria rei vel ex passionibus commotionibusque animorum nostrorum, ex natura quidem propria ‘primam materiam’ nuncupans et item ‘simile’ quiddam ‘mollis cedentisque materiae in quam imprimuntur signacula et rerum receptaculum’ et interdum ‘matrem’ atque ‘nutriculam totius generationis’, ex passione vero audientium, cum dicit ‘adulterino quodam intellectu recordandam et contiguam sine tangentium sensu’.³²⁰

This explanation of Plato’s preference of a host of more descriptive terms in place over *silva* (that is, *ὕλη*) underlines that the missing word is a weighty signifier. The syntax demonstrates this as well, in that *silva* needs no elaboration, while the banality and neutrality of *materia* demands qualification as “primam materiam”, “mollis cedentisque materiae” and, in a later passage, “materiam principalem”.³²¹ *Silva*, a word primed to hold metaphysical weight on its own, must be a type of *materia*, a word with relatively little semantic force. Tasso most

³¹⁹ For Lucan’s *silvae* see Bright, *Elaborate Disarray*, 35-37. Quintilian’s description is in the *Institutio Oratoria*, 10:3.17.

³²⁰ *Platonis Timaeus* §308.

³²¹ *Platonis Timaeus* §317.

likely would not have known Plato directly but through commentaries and Marsilio Ficino's translations he could have boasted as much familiarity with Platonic philosophy as any of his erudite contemporaries. Indeed, he opens the *Discorso del poema eroico*, his revision of the *Arte poetica*, with a reference to the *Timaeus*, the very source of Plato's views on matter, clear evidence that these theories would have come across Tasso's desk.

But in what vocabulary would they have been expressed? The more rigorous neo-Latin scholarship from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that survives annotated in Tasso's hand uses *materia* to translate both Aristotle's *ύλη* and much of Plato's terminology. Marsilio Ficino's 1466 commentary of the *Timaeus* uses the term *materia* exclusively, emphasizing the generative aspect of Plato's materialism with the formulation that "Intellectus divinus est mundi pater, Materia mater",³²² while Basilios Bessarion's fifteenth-century translation of the *Metaphysics* describes a soul as "aliter [...] materia, & aliter ratio",³²³ in agreement with other contemporary Aristotelian commentaries in his collection.³²⁴ While the Latin *silva* had once boasted the collective quality that embraced the notion of an imaginable metaphysical ingredient, the shapeless teleology of *materia* emerged as the catchword for both materialist theses, welcoming the maternal Platonic receptacle with its etymology and calling out for an Aristotelian materialization in its abstractness. One instance of this translational synthesis is Lodovico Castelvetro's use of *materia* for subject matter in his Italian translation of the *Poetics* and its subsequent citation by Tasso, Pomponio Torelli and Lionardo Salviati in their

³²² See Marsilio Ficino, [In] *omnia platonis opera*, in *Opera omnia*, eds. Mario Sancierpiano and Paul Oskar Kristeller (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmio, 1959), 2.1:1130-1536, 2:1474. For the dating of Ficino's commentary see paragraph 32 of Piero Caponsachi's "Vita di Marsilio Ficino", in Raymond Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1958), 690-730.

³²³ See Bessarion's translation, *Metaphysicorum lib[ri]*, in *Operum Aristotelis tomus tertius*, ed. Basilios Bessarion (Basil: Opinerus, 1548), 384-486.

³²⁴ The commentaries on Aristotle's *On the Soul* that Tasso read, such as Francisco Vicomercato's of 1570 and Antonio Montecatini's of 1576, likewise employ *materia* and *forma*. For Tasso's library see Carini, "I postillati 'barberiani'", 106-110.

theoretical writings.³²⁵ There is no doubt this critical context was influential in shaping Tasso's ideas about literary *materia* but, rather than oppose his views to those of his contemporaries, this dissertation finds more relevance investigating whether the values he establishes around the term in his first discourse carry over into the *Liberata*.

As with the Latin *silva*, the Italian word *selva* connotes considerably more substance than its twin *materia*.³²⁶ A generation after Tasso, the Crusca *Vocabolario* will again look back to the fourteenth-century masters for a definition of *selva* that prescribes only the meaning of 'forest', far and away the principal usage reported in literature from this period:

Boscaglia grande. Lat. *sylva*. gr. ὄλη.
 [Dec. 5.3.11:] E come seppe, verso una selva grandissima volse il suo ronzino.
 [Inf. 1.5:] Ah quanto a dir qual' era è cosa dura Esta selva selvaggia, e aspra, e forte. [Inf. 20.129:] Alcuna volta, per la selva fonda.
 [RVF 323.51:] Vedendo per la selva altera, e sola.³²⁷

The rare poetic extension likewise conjures a conglomeration of things: Ariosto and Tasso both imagine a thicket of arrows, a phrasing likely borrowed from Vergil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *De bello civile*.³²⁸ Connotations of formlessness and substance from the Latin *materia* and *silva* are solidified in the vernacular. In the *Poema eroico*, Tasso himself will refer to the "grandissima selva de la materia poetica", reinforcing the collective sense of a noun washed of its more substantial meaning.³²⁹ The most prominent exception to this semantic restriction, however, would be the successful figurative extension as a generic title for collections of occasional poetry, deriving from a classical practice exemplified by Statius and Lucan. Italian variations include Lorenzo de' Medici's vernacular *Selve*, a vision poem

³²⁵ Pietro Mazzucchelli argues Tasso's *Estratto della Poetica del Castelvetro*, a dialogic set of notes to a manuscript in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, is a sketch for a discourse never completed; see *Opere del Tasso*, ed. Giorgio Rosini (Pisa: s.n., 1823), 12:351. For the critical writings see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 954-1073.

³²⁶ *Poema eroico* 2, in Poma, ed., 79.

³²⁷ See Accademia della Crusca, *Vocabolario*, s.v. "selva", italics original.

³²⁸ See, respectively, *OF* 18.22; *GL* 18.76; *Aeneid* 10.886-887; and *De bello civile* 10.201-206.

³²⁹ *Poema eroico* 2, in Poma, ed., 79.

in octaves begun in 1473,³³⁰ but the most thorough introduction to the *silva* genre was offered to Italian intellectuals by Angelo Poliziano in the 1480s.

A rigorous defender of Statius and the other classical writers that Florentine humanists discredited for their apparent lack of eloquence,³³¹ Poliziano delivered his first lecture at the University of Florence in the spring of 1481 on the brilliance and pedagogical utility of Statius's *Silvae*, using a traditional botanical metaphor:

Nam quemadmodum novelles vitibus humiliora primum adminicula atque pedamenta agricolae adiungunt, quibus se gradatim claviculis illis suis quasique manibus attollentes in summa tandem iuga evadant, ita nec statim ad ipsos sicuti primi ordinis scriptores vocandi adolescentes, sed humilioribus iis, qui tamen haud abiecti humi iacentesque sint, quasi paulatim invitandi sublevandique videntur.³³²

Over the following five years, Poliziano delivered verse introductions to his lectures on Vergil (the *Manto* of November 1482), on georgic literature (the *Rusticus* of October 1483), on Homer (the *Ambra* of autumn 1485) and Western poetry writ large (the *Nutricia*, completed by October 1486). These were published under the title of 'silva', most of them just days after their delivery,³³³ and they consistently refer to Statius's *Silvae* in style and substance,³³⁴ although Poliziano never dwells on the link between forests and words at the base of the genre he inherited from Statius. All the same, Poliziano is responsible for the reintroduction of the full potential of the *silva* genre to Italian intellectuals.

Eventually the genre of *silva* came to organize projects with less lofty poetic ambitions than those animating Poliziano's *Silvae*. Pedro Mexía appears to be the first

³³⁰ For the dating of the *Selve* see Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva", 536-537.

³³¹ On Poliziano's antiquarian agenda see Charles Fantazzi, "Introduction", in Angelo Poliziano, *Silvae*, tr. and ed. Charles Fantazzi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), vi-xx, viii-ix.

³³² See Angelo Poliziano, *Oratio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvis*, in Eugenio Garin, ed., *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1952), 869-885, 870.

³³³ For the dating of the *Silvae* see Fantazzi, "Introduction", xii; see also Charles Fantazzi, "Note on the Text", in Angelo Poliziano, *Silvae*, tr. and ed. Charles Fantazzi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 163-164, 164. They are first published as a collection by Aldus Manutius in 1498; see Francesco Bausi, "Nota al testo", in Angelo Poliziano, *Silvae*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Florence: Olschki, 1996), xxiii-liv, xxxv.

³³⁴ For references to Statius in Poliziano's *Silvae* see Fantazzi, "Introduction", xiii-xviii.

European vernacular writer to extend the term to a collection of miscellaneous prose reference articles, paving the way for handbook-style *silvae* that would flourish well into the seventeenth century. Introducing his *Silva de varia lección*, published in Seville in 1540, Mexía explains his selection of the metaphor:

Y como en esto, como en lo demás, los ingenios de los hombres son tan varios y cada uno va por diverso camino, siguiendo yo al mío, escogí y hame parecido escrevir este libro assí, por discursos y capítulos de diversos propósitos, sin perseverar ni guardar orden en ellos; y por esto le puse por nombre *Silva*, porque en las selvas y bosques están las plantas y árboles sin orden ni regla. Y aunque esta manera de escrevir sea nueva en nuestra lengua castellana y creo que soy yo el primero que haya tomado esta invención, en la griega y latina muy grandes autores escribieron assí, como fueron Ateneo, Vindice Cecilio, Aulio Gelio, Macrobio, y aun en nuestros tiempos, Petro Crinito, Ludovico Celio, Nicolao Leónico y otros algunos.³³⁵

Mexía's *Silva* saw three Italian translations by 1564 and imitations in various languages almost immediately.³³⁶ As this style of miscellany began to adopt referential compositional strategies like alphabetization and indices, the *silva* came to constitute a standard form of publication in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century natural philosophy.³³⁷ But even the wriest takes on scientific *silvae*, such as Francis Bacon's *Sylva sylvarum*, published in 1626, or John Evelyn's 1664 *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest-Trees*, fail to offer explicit meditation on the metaphor at the base of their titles.

As in natural philosophy, poets owing their generic commitment to Poliziano and Mexía's repopularization of the *silva* genre also overlooked the figurative connection at the root of the term.³³⁸ Ben Jonson is one of the few who finds the metaphor at the base of his

³³⁵ See the "Proemio y prelación de la obra" in Pedro Mexía, *Silva de varia lección*, ed. Antonio Castro (Madrid: Catedra, 1989-1990), 1:161-165, 1:161-162.

³³⁶ For Mexía's legacy see Antonio Castro, "Introducción", in Pedro Mexía, *Silva de varia lección*, ed. Antonio Castro (Madrid: Catedra, 1989-1990), 7-132, 52-59 and 121-126; see also Paolo Cherchi, *Ministorie di microgeneri*, eds. Chiara Fabbian, Alessandro Rebonato and Emanuela Zanotti Carney (Ravenna: Longo, 2003), 88-105.

³³⁷ For the emergence of scientific *silvae* see Frans De Bruyn, "The Classical *Silva* and the Generic Development of Scientific Writing in Seventeenth-Century England", *New Literary History* 32.2 (2001): 347-373.

³³⁸ Neither Antonio Castro nor Paolo Cherchi records the metaphor being exploited by any collection before

silvae, his *Forest* of 1616 and the *Under-wood* from around 1633,³³⁹ worthy of remark:

With the same leave, the Ancients call'd that kind of body *Sylva*, or "Υλη, in which there were workes of divers nature, and matter congested; as the multitude call Timber-trees, promiscuously growing, a *Wood*, or *Forrest* so I am bold to entitle these lesser Poems, of later growth, by this of *Under-wood*, out of the Analogie they hold to the *Forrest*, in my former booke, and no otherwise.³⁴⁰

But in justifying his derivative metaphor of undergrowth Jonson seems to pass over the initial link between the forest and the diversity of matter congested within it. Was the forest analogy simply too obvious to be mentioned — or perhaps too cliché a metaphor to even warrant notice? Paolo Cherchi suggests that when writers before Mexía used the term *silva* “il significato non era quello di bosco ma quello di «materia prima»”, given that the term “aveva anche un preciso significato retorico, secondo cui «silva» sarebbe uno «schizzo»”.³⁴¹ But were the meanings really so distinct that a reference to all three escaped all previous literary elaboration? This dissertation has found the forest as a symbol for the text in three Italian works already considered canonical by 1540 and will do the same for the later *Liberata*, which Tasso may have begun to conceive as early as 1559,³⁴² that responds strongly to the traditions established by the earlier three. Indeed, consider the above-cited passage of Mexía’s introduction to his miscellany against the description the *Decameron* offers of its

Mexía’s: see Castro, “Introducción”, 120-126; and Cherchi, *Ministorie*, 88-105. *Silvae* that definitely omit reference to the forest origin of their genre include Antonio de Córdoba, *Sylva amplissima decisionum, et variarum resolutionum casuum conscientiae* (Venice: Barezi, 1604); Luis Lobera de Avila, *Remedio de cuerpos humanos y silva de experiencias y otras cosas utilísimas* (Alcalá de Henares: de Brocar, 1542); Agostino Mascardi, *Silvarum libri IV* (Antwerp: Plantijnsche, 1622); and Giovan Battista Mattioli, *Selva historiale di diversi essempli* (Rome: Cavalli, 1656).

³³⁹ For the dating of Jonson’s works see Charles Harold Herford, Percy Simpson and Emily Simpson, “The Text of the Poems” in Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, eds. Charles Harold Herford, Percy Simpson and Emily Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-1963): 8:3-20, 16-18.

³⁴⁰ See Ben Jonson, “To the Reader”, in *Ben Jonson*, eds. Charles Harold Herford, Percy Simpson and Emily Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-1963): 8:128, italics original.

³⁴¹ *Ministorie*, 83.

³⁴² Between 1559 and 1560 Tasso began drafting a chivalric narrative poem, the *Gierusalemme*, left incomplete after publishing a longer poem in the same genre, the 1561 *Rinaldo*. Each of these works can be considered to have germinated the vision for Tasso’s chivalric masterpiece. For the dating of the *Gierusalemme* see di Pietro, *Il “Gierusalemme”*, 9.

ninth day of storytelling, a day with no thematic limitations:

[...] assai manifestamente veggiamo che, poi che i buoi alcuna parte del giorno hanno faticato sotto il giogo ristretti, quegli esser dal giogo alleviati e disciolti, e liberamente dove lor più piace, per li boschi lasciati sono andare alla pastura: e veggiamo ancora non esser men belli ma molto più i giardini di varie piante fronzuti che i boschi ne' quali solamente querce veggiamo; per le quali cose io estimo, avendo riguardo quanti giorni sotto certa legge ristretti ragionato abbiamo, che, sì come a bisognosi, di vagare alquanto e vagando riprender forze a rientrar sotto il giogo non solamente sia utile ma oportuno (*Dec.* 8.ω.4).

Could it not be argued that by inaugurating a series of miscellaneous tales with an excursion through the forest that Boccaccio has imagined a *silva* of short stories, two centuries *avant la lettre*? And surely the concepts of raw material, subject matter and wood were not so subtly connected that the *selva oscura* that opens Dante's *Commedia* cannot cogently represent the poem's base state of beginning. It may thus be more logical to understand that, despite his innovation in applying the title to a new category of textual organization, Mexía was drawing on ancient etymological associations that in his wake would have become relatively cliché to the Romance intellectuals interested in perpetuating the genre.

As in the case of Mexía, neither Tasso nor Dante are the first to combine the three valences of *ύλη* into a single literary invention. And while Tasso is clearly looking back on Dante's forest landscapes for his infernal descriptions — even describing the haunted wood as a “novella Dite” (*GL* 13.27) —perhaps his perspective is mediated by Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra*. In this chivalric narrative, which Poliziano left incomplete by 1478, a sequence of landscapes carry the protagonist from the woods towards his spiritual elevation, landscapes that Mario Martelli argues are designed along a metaphysical hierarchy, evidenced by the appearance of a white doe,³⁴³ a symbol Martelli glosses as “l'amo che Dio getta davanti alla fame dei nostri sensi, affinché cominciamo a muoverci verso la bellezza e

³⁴³ See Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano di Piero de' Medici*, in *Poesie*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Turin: UTET, 2006), 109-240, 1.34.

quindi, di tappa in tappa, verso di lui”.³⁴⁴ The product of Poliziano’s thorough meditation on the sensual forest in the early modern Italian literary imaginary,³⁴⁵ the forest of the *Stanze* can be thus read as literalizing its metaphysical etymology by establishing a metaphor between the setting and the protagonist’s base metaphysical state. Without other settings to compare for metaliterary import, the *intentio operis* cannot validate the intuition that Poliziano has combined these two valences of *ὄλη* with a textual metaphor or overarching metaliterary reference but, nonetheless, Poliziano’s originality and relevance to this dissertation lies in his innovation, as is often the case in early modern Italian poetry. The metaphysically charged forest of the *Stanze* introduced to the chivalric ambit an Augustinian-Dantesque invention that had previously only been used in overtly moral narratives, leading the way for Tasso’s more subtle integration of a similar moral hierarchy into his forest.

From Latin to Italian the semantic polarization between *silva* and *materia* is complete. The Tuscan derivative *selva*, by the middle of the sixteenth century, can only refer to forest topographies, save for the occasional poetic turn of phrase for a thicket of arrows and for a particularly successful figurative extension as a literary term in the *selva* genre of miscellany that saw reincarnations well into the seventeenth century.³⁴⁶ *Materia*, in Italian, carries the same flaccid meanings of the Latin homograph. The first proper Italian dictionary, the Accademia della Crusca’s 1612 *Vocabolario*, defines it as “Soggetto, o principio di qualunque componimento, o cosa sensibile, o intelligibile”, and as examples gives only figurative uses, most as subject matter.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ See Martelli, [Introduction], 1:803. As he argues in a later study, Poliziano “non poteva introdurre sulla scena una *selva*, senza che quell’ente si gravasse di tutti i significati di cui una civiltà plurisecolare lo aveva dotato”; see Mario Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano. Storia e metastoria* (Lecce: Conte, 1995), 110, italics original.

³⁴⁵ On the sources of Poliziano’s forest see Martelli, *Storia e metastoria*, 110-118.

³⁴⁶ For the long history of the *silva* genre, see De Bruyn, “The Classical Silva”.

³⁴⁷ See the 1612 *Vocabolario* on the Crusca’s *Lessicografia in rete*, s.v. “materia”.

Reading Tasso's poetry in light of his theoretical treatise, then, one can see the *Liberata* proposing the same simile between poetry and carpentry from the opposite direction, whereby the construction of military instruments coincides with the successful construction of a military poem. His poetic theory is articulated through the keyword "materia", which communicates a hierarchy of artistic creation established by centuries of commentary, and betrays a totalizing reading of Aristotelean metaphysics and literary theory. Tasso's poetics is illuminated in the *Liberata* through his exploitation of the two latent meanings of the word "materia" that he uses for the Crusaders' lumber: as a rhetorical reference to his own text and the metaphysical notion of a pre-creation. The following section examines how these two references combine to suggest a metaphysical statement about the poem itself and appears to be the first extended analysis of the forest of the *Liberata* in light of the lexical similarity with the *Arte poetica*, with the exception of Jean-Christophe Cavallin's 2004 monograph *Poeta faber. Allegorie della materia*.³⁴⁸ Held in only six libraries, only one outside of Italy,³⁴⁹ this overlooked study uncovers extensive metaliterary reflection in the wooden instruments of European literature, including a raft in the *Decameron* and the Crusaders' machinery in the *Liberata*. The arguments that follow predate the author's encounter with Cavallin's study but find similar articulation in his third chapter. Such a coincidence indicates the validity of the common metaliterary reading of Tasso and, if nothing else, the following section offers insights resembling Cavallin's to readers of English.

³⁴⁸ See Cavallin's *Poeta faber*.

³⁴⁹ The library holdings were retrieved from from worldcat.org, using OCLC number 491090437.

The Forest as Instrument

The metaliterary extension of *materia* in the *Liberata* can be easily discerned by a summation of the poem's stringently causal plot. The diegetic *materia* aligns with Tasso's narrative *materia*, as the Crusaders' struggle to secure and utilize building material from the surrounding forest constitutes the fundamental obstacle of the narrative. The topography offers only one navigable entrance into the walled city (*GL* 3.55), which is guarded heavily by King Aladino's forces and which Crusaders can only penetrate with towers, rams and architraves. As soon as these sympathetic Christian characters can build and employ their instruments, their victory will be ensured, so to delay this inevitable conclusion for an appropriately epic interval, Tasso introduces several limitations to the Christians' ability to find and keep necessary building materials. The arid terrain is first made to offer only a single source of wood, in the sole forest "oltra sei miglia" (*GL* 3.56) from the city. Once overcoming this scarcity of wood, the Crusaders see their machines destroyed in a surprise attack and the tower that survives the raid gets torched in the following canto. To prevent the Crusaders from rebuilding the machines that guarantee their success, the mage Ismeno haunts the woods, circling them with a ring of fire and infusing a demonic simulacrum into each of its trees. One Crusader after another fails, leaving the waylaid Rinaldo as the Christians' last hope, but a full four cantos elapse before he can be freed from his imprisonment "oltre i confini [...] del mondo nostro" (*GL* 14.35). Once returned to the forest, Rinaldo disenchant the woods, a Ligurian master carpenter builds the machines and the Crusaders triumph rather handily over the defending army. The completion of the Crusaders' military equipment is achieved only at the very end of the poem and thus aligns with the near completion of Tasso's own construction of a Christian military narrative.

This summary demonstrates the importance of the forest plotline in the poem, since Aristotelian unities demand a strict causality and the obstacles encountered in amassing and maintaining a supply of lumber substantiate the otherwise problematic delay between the Christians' arrival and their victory. In this way, the forest is the foundation of the poem but, unlike with the *Furioso*, the self-identification is not celebratory. Instead, the forest is the narrative stuff waiting heroic transformation, the *materia* that Tasso's treatise dedicates two books to arranging, forming and ultimately transforming into a proper *favola*. The alignment between the forest and the story need not merely rely on an intuitive analysis of macronarrative but is confirmed by the repeated use of the term *materia*, fundamental to the *Arte poetica*, in presentations of the forest scene in the *Liberata*.

In the *Liberata*, the word *materia* emerges alongside more specific terminology as a recurrent term for the building supplies the Crusaders seek from the woods. The opening to the thirteenth canto, where the forest assumes the most prominence, features a typical example:

Ma cadde a pena in cenere l'immensa
machina espugnatrice de la mura,
che 'n sé novi argomenti Ismen ripens
perché piú resti la città sicura;
onde a i Franchi impedir ciò che dispensa
lor di materia il bosco egli procura,
onde contra Sion battuta e scossa
torre nova rifarsi indi non possa (GL 13.1).

This stanza reveals the importance of the forest for the military strategies of both the advancing and defending armies, as the dispensary for the Crusaders' construction materials, and initiates the subplot of the mage Ismeno's enchantments that will stall military progress for five additional cantos. In the scenes describing the Crusaders' attempts to overcome the enchantment, Tasso makes four additional references to the *materia* sought out from the forest, always characterizing the forest in terms of its relationship to the needed machines.

In order to rebuild them, Captain Goffredo “i fabri al bosco invia che porger sòle / ad uso tal pronta materia ed atta” (*GL* 13.17). Realizing the extent of their hindrance, though, the chief Crusader

Pensa s’egli medesmo andar là deggia
[...]
o se pur di materia altra proveggia
lontana piú, ma non difficil tanto (*GL* 13.50).

The usage of *materia* in these three cases connotes the lumber’s perceived availability: the materials are ready, suitable, and typically provided — even dispensed — with little difficulty. The eighteenth canto opens with another typical usage of *materia* that is here contrasted with the more specific word *legno*:

L’antichissima selva, onde fu inanti
de’ nostri ordigni la materia tratta,
[...] ora è d’incanti
secreta stanza e formidabil fatta,
né v’è chi legno di troncar si vanti.³⁵⁰

As in Ismeno’s earlier invocation of demonic spirits — “Come il corpo è de l’alma albergo e veste / così d’alcun di voi sia ciascun legno” (*GL* 13.8) — the word *legno* refers more to the tree than the wood hewn from it though *legno* is also used throughout the *Liberata* to refer to ships, made primarily of wood, as was common in sixteenth-century parlance. The phantasmagoric Clorinda had also used the word to refer to the tree’s integrity, warning Tancredi that “Son di sensi animati i rami e i tronchi, / e micidial sei tu, se legno tronchi” (*GL* 13.43). In these examples, the semantic distinction is one of exploitability: *materia* is always available while *legno* can only be obtained through molestation. This active availability is seized upon in a thoughtful process of selection, as when Goffredo finally enters “l’antica selva, e quindi è tolta / materia tal qual buon giudicio elesse” (*GL* 18.41).

³⁵⁰ *GL* 18.1. For *legno* as wood for building, see *GL* 12.45, 13.45, 13.81 and 18.3.

Uses of *materia* outside the forests of the *Liberata* follow the same subjugation to teleologies as within and, thus, as the word is used across the poem it consistently conveys a substance that awaits, if not actively welcomes, the realization of its formal potential by an expert hand. The pagan warrior Argante's sword is praised for the artifice applied to it:

[...] 'l fabro egregio
l'else e 'l pomo le fe' gemmato e d'oro,
con magistero tal che perde il pregio
de la ricca materia appo il lavoro (GL 2.93).

Though the raw metal material is itself fine, it still loses something of its own essential worth by gaining its form. Losing through gaining: echoing the identity-emptying impulse that distinguishes Aristotle's *ύλη* from the Platonic model, each discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, these uses recast *materia* as wanting form, often a specific form. A later description of the silver reliefs on Armida's castle doors opens an exquisite ekphrasis of a more fatal artistry by which "vinta la materia è dal lavoro" (GL 16.2), an expression articulated almost identically in Poliziano's *Stanze*.³⁵¹ The vulnerability implied in these uses mirror the readiness of the *materia* to be first received by its instrumentalizers: the Christian captain sends his troops to the woods "che porger sòle / ad uso tal pronta materia ed atta" and, when the magic impediment becomes impractical, he wonders whether a more remote forest "di materia altra proveggia / [...] ma non difficil tanto". Here the imposition of form conquers its material and, like the teleology implied by the use of *materia* for lumber elsewhere in the poem, each of these formulations calls for the subjugation of matter to form in order to glorify its instrumentalization.

While in the *Liberata* the word *materia* is used to make other references, its repeated use as a reference to lumber rings odd with respect to sixteenth-century narrative poetry. The

³⁵¹ In *Stanze* 1.95, the temple in the Garden of Venus is built of precious stone, "ma vinta è la materia dal lavoro". In his edition (188), Francesco Bausi finds the phrase in Ovid and Boccaccio, interestingly all around a moment of ekphrasis, which often invites metaliterary attention.

word is not common to the contemporaneous exponents of the chivalric narratives that Tasso most often compares against to own poem, Ariosto's *Furioso* and Giangiorgio Trissino's 1548 *Italia liberata dai Goti*. Leaving aside references to ships, *legno* and its derivatives recur throughout the *Furioso* as wooden building material and firewood, while *materia* almost always appears as a reference to subject matter, often for the narrator's own rhetoric production.³⁵² In Trissino's *Italia liberata dai Goti*, *materia* is preferred only once to *legno* or *legname* and even this usage appears in combination with wood-specific material, "legnami".³⁵³ The *Italia liberata* features the term to refer to an unspecified building material, subject matter, geometric substance and occasion,³⁵⁴ while the *Furioso* makes more ample use of the term, never explicitly for lumber but instead for stone (*OF* 10.60), unspecified building material (*OF* 40.16: "altra materia"), subject matter (*OF* 3.56, 29.29, 37.10 and 43.6), occasion (*OF* 8.41), and causal basis (*OF* 37.13 and 43.86).

Materia may well never have had strong wooden origins in the Italian romance. Boiardo never uses the word and Luigi Pulci's *Morgante* employs it in several expected ways — once in a resounding metaphysical couplet, "sai ch'ogni cosa vuol principio e norma, / 'accordar la materia con la forma"³⁵⁵ — but never for wooden material properly speaking. If Tasso's use of the Italian *materia* is not a feature of his genre, surely his emphatic preference over *legno* and its derivatives suggests his embrace of something within the word itself. *Materia* for wooden material is extremely infrequent in Tasso's *Rinaldo* and even more uses than in the *Liberata* emerge in the *Conquistata*. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest

³⁵² See *OF* 8.61, 21.1, 25.100, and 27.15, among others.

³⁵³ See Gian Giorgio Trissino, *Italia liberata dai goti*, in *Biblioteca Italiana*, bibliotecaitaliana.it, dir. Amadeo Quondam (2006), book 21: "Poi non fu Gotto alcun che non pigliasse / legnami o sassi e no i gettasse sopra / la gran ruina e le cadute pietre: / [...] / così gettando ognun materia molta / crebbe su quella piazzia un alto monte".

³⁵⁴ See, respectively, books 22, 13, 9 and again 13 of Trissino's *Italia liberata*.

³⁵⁵ *Morgante*, in Luigi Pulci, *Morgante e opere minori*, ed. Aulo Greco (Turin: UTET, 2004), 1:57-2:1206.

Tasso's insistence on *materia* for lumber, in defiance of common parlance, grows as his literary theories are more and more formally developed. His selection would need to have welcomed the polyvalent charge entrusted to *materia* from its ancestors *silva* and *ῥύλη* and its figurative associations with manufacture, metaphysics, and literary theory, all outlined above. Tasso conjures nearly all of these nuances of *materia* on the very first page of his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* and it is this text that informs his seemingly stubborn recourse to the term in the *Liberata*.

The coincidence alerts a reader of the metaliterary argument being fashioned in the *Liberata*: not only is the building material a metaphor for subject matter but it is also the actual subject matter of the poem Tasso is presently writing. But the forest has additional metaliterary resonance from other generic ambitions it overtly serves, most importantly the subjugation of amorous thematics to military matter in the chivalric narrative. As is discussed in the following section, a forest setting also introduces the Ethiopian warrior Clorinda's encounter between the Crusader Tancredi, who spots her at a spring and immediately falls in love. The sexual plotline is decisively routed by the fatal skirmish between the two warriors, priming the reader for the deflation of all other romantic plotlines. If heavy reliance on the forest allowed Boiardo to marry Arthurian romance with Carolingian warfare, a much more surgical recourse to the same setting allows Tasso to separate them once and for all.

Beyond its potential for amorous developments, the forest of Saron is also enchanted, it introduces marvel and exotic supernatural phenomena into an otherwise pious poem but banishes them with Rinaldo's righteous sword. The reluctant figure of Rinaldo offers an apt metaliterary symbol for the poet himself, who brings closure after all other narrative options have been exhausted. Rinaldo's quest, like Tasso's, is to eradicate from the world of the poem

all presence of magic and unorthodoxy, the strangely believable marvels that allowed Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* to present itself as coterminous with the forest, as was proposed in the previous chapter. There is no question that, writing in Ariosto's shadow, Tasso would have associated the setting with the romance tradition — perhaps this is why the forest in the *Liberata* is cut down on sight. The macrotextual concern with converting the forest into war machines reflects Tasso's desire to construct a Christian epic from the material of the lascivious romance in a “conversione *unheimlich* della selva ariostesca”.³⁵⁶ If the forest stands for the romance, then, Tasso's programmatic instrumentalization seeks to rehabilitate towards more virtuous ends a literary topos that had heretofore only offered errant individualism. With Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* the forest is not the domain of the romance but a set of subject matter awaiting conversion into an instrument of the Christian epic — for Ariosto the forest is a space, while for Tasso the forest is more of a prop.

The forest is an all-purpose source of matter: amorous and marvelous episodes can spring from the setting while the military macronarrative itself depends on the inaccessibility of its lumber. The inaccessible, marvelous forest crossroads thus represent a feature of the genre that the poem demonstrates its intent to surpass. The enchantment of the forest in the thirteenth canto and its subsequent disenchantment in the eighteenth can be interpreted in many metaliterary ways but most would maintain the forest as a vehicle: for bringing closure to Tancredi's traumatic love for Clorinda, for implanting and then exorcising the dangerously suggestive stuff of romance all according to unity of plot, for calling Rinaldo back into the fold and, most importantly, for prolonging the Christians' inability to build machines for the length of the poem. All these motives also serve to propel the story in a distinctly heroic

³⁵⁶ Sergio Zatti, *L'ombra del Tasso. Epica e romanzo nel Cinquecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), 22, italics original.

fashion. The forest, in short, represents and constitutes the subject matter that the narrator is at working shaping into a proper heroic poem.

But what pattern does the work of shaping this story follow? The forest in the diegetic world of the *Liberata* is constantly described in its potential to furnish something else, be it weapons, demonic counterweapons or tombs. On a metaliterary level the forest is exploited for its potential to sustain a lengthy narrative while providing both ingress and egress to episodes of popular though critically problematic marvel. The pattern recurs throughout the poem: sexually charged storylines are introduced only to be thwarted for chaster purposes and the most adventuresome and exotic aspects — such as Armida’s garden in the mythic Isole Felici in the middle of the Atlantic in the fifteenth canto — are always liminal points of departure. Even the lexical and syntactical arrangements, Charles Peter Brand argues, function more for their heroism than for any other aspect.³⁵⁷ The same structural exploitations are seen in the diegetic treatment of not only the forest but elements in many other plotlines, from the conversion of virtuous infidels to reunion of the Christian army and the seizing of the holy city. Overcoming, conquering, liberating, transforming: the *Liberata* is a drama of instrumentalization and this teleological emplotment is spelled out in miniature with Tasso’s treatment of the forest.

Such instrumentalization is the fate of everything that enters the world of the *Liberata*, which takes its topography from history, its virtues from religion and its determining principles from a totalized vision of Aristotle’s precepts of raw matter and literary invention. So what is the ultimate end of this world? Throughout the *Arte poetica*, Tasso dwells on a double need, a pleasurable reading experience that can further the reader’s

³⁵⁷ On style in the *Liberata* see Charles Peter Brand, *Torquato Tasso: A Study of the Poet and His Contribution to English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 110-116.

intellect towards heroic ideals. These notions of *giovemento* and *diletto* are derived from the Horatian prescription that an award-winning writer “miscuit utile dulci / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo”,³⁵⁸ a famous dictum in sixteenth-century literary criticism that Tasso refashions in his invocation to the Muse in the third stanza of the poem:

Sai che là corre il mondo ove più versi
di sue dolcezze il lusinghier Parnaso,
e che 'l vero, condito in molli versi,
i più schivi allettando ha persuaso.
Così a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
di soavi licor gli orli del vaso:
succhi amari ingannato intanto ei beve,
e da l'inganno suo vita riceve (*GL* 1.3).

While the practice of candying moral truths in soothing tones relates more to *elocutio* than the other metaphors of shipbuilding and collecting lumber, which concern *inventio* and *dispositio*, the dynamic of instrumentalization is the same: the substance must be given a more appropriate form to satisfy the teleological objectives. Verse, storyline, plot and character all await the same transformation: the forest exists to be cut down and be in the form of as machines and towers, the exceptional infidel must be slain and baptized, Jerusalem must be delivered.

On a macronarrative level, readers can see the entire narrative as a series of confrontations with rather naked literary obstacles that must be overcome, various errant elements to be reined in. But readers of the Christians' easy victory in the last canto recognize the poem is not about defeating the enemy but instead about preparing to do so. This preparatory character of the *Liberata* is one authorial admission salvageable from the specious exaggerations of the *Allegoria del poema* that Tasso prepares by 1575 to defend his orthodoxy. Included as an afterword in the first printing of the poem in 1581 and as a standard paratext in subsequent editions, the postface argues that *Liberata* dramatizes the

³⁵⁸ *Ars poetica* 343-344.

unification of the Christian Church as a body out of balance in its struggle to reach Jerusalem, which itself stands for the “felicità civile” that “conviene ad uomo cristiano”.³⁵⁹ This Christian “uomo virile, il quale è composto d’anima e di corpo, e d’anima non semplice, ma distinta in molte e varie potenze” is in turn represented by the Christian camp, with its various component parts spread across various characters — Goffredo, for example, often called the *capo* of the army in the *Liberata* is named the intellectual faculty in the *Allegoria*, Rinaldo, “la destra”, the seat of passions. The univocality and selectiveness of the *Allegoria* disqualify it as a sincere authorial confession but it does nonetheless confirm some of the poem’s basic operations.³⁶⁰

A more relevant feature of the original composition revealed by the reductive *Allegoria* is the minimal value held by the forest outside the tight itinerary of allegoresis:

l’esercito, in cui già Rinaldo e tutti gli altri cavalieri [...] sono ritornati e sono ubbidienti al capitano, significa l’uomo già ridotto ne lo stato de la giustizia natural [...] ed, oltre a ciò, ne lo stato de la ubidienza divina; allora facilmente è disincantato il bosco, espugnata la città e sconfitto l’esercito nemico: cioè, superati agevolmente tutti gli esterni impedimenti, l’uomo consegue la felicità politica.³⁶¹

Dissimulation aside, it is still relevant that this gloss should align the exorcism of the forest with the rest of the narrative tasks of this putative allegory-poem: the forest, again, emerges as sequential, dependent on a larger teleology. The *Allegoria* also validates the intuition that the *Liberata* that indeed concludes quite “facilmente”.³⁶² That the poem should also close very abruptly, without even depicting the interior of the sepulcher named in the first stanza,³⁶³ suggests that there is a more specific objective at hand here. The *Liberata* is not

³⁵⁹ See *Allegoria del poema*, 303.

³⁶⁰ Walter Stephens argues for the dissimulative character of the *Allegoria* in “Metaphor, Sacrament, and the Problem of Allegory in *Gerusalemme Liberata*”, *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4 (1991): 217-247, 235-246.

³⁶¹ *Allegoria*, 309.

³⁶² *Allegoria*, 307.

³⁶³ In *GL* 1.1, Goffredo is named as the “capitano / che ‘l gran sepolcro liberò di Cristo”.

about the adoration of the holy tomb — it is instead about getting there: that ultimate end where, as the *Allegoria* frames it, “l’intelletto [...] deve finalmente riposarsi nelle orazioni e nelle contemplazioni de’ beni dell’altra vita beatissima ed immortale”,³⁶⁴ is kept off the page, to occupy the reader once the poem is over. The obsessive reining in of the knights, the adverse weather, the adventure impulse and the primary dependence on the *materia* of the forest are not just “esterni impedimenti” but their being “superati” is precisely the point of the poem and its ubiquitous instrumentalizations.

Christian morality is said to have implicated not only the choice of action and characters but also of landscape, as in the explanation of the haunted forest:

Gli incanti d’Ismeno nella selva, che ingannano con delusioni, altro non significano che la falsità delle ragioni e delle persuasioni, la qual si genera nella selva, ciò è nella moltitudine e varietà de’ pareri e de’ discorsi umani. [...] Il fuoco, il turbine, le tenebre, i mostri e l’altre sì fatte apparenze; sono gl’ingannevoli argomenti che ci dimostrano le oneste fatiche, gli onorati pericoli, sotto imagine di male. I fiori, i fonti, i ruscelli, gl’instrumenti musici, le ninfe; sono i fallaci sillogismi che ci mettono innanzi gli agi e i dilette del senso sotto apparenza di bene.³⁶⁵

Astute readers do not regard as authoritative the uncompromising referentiality spread unevenly across the poem — Tasso himself predicts the addressee of the *Allegoria* will laugh at its uniformity³⁶⁶ — but behind the spurious allegory there remains a valid potential for allegoresis coherent with the instrumental poetics of the *Arte poetica*.

Regardless of the referents it assigns, the *Allegoria* asserts that the forest and its plants are vehicles for symbolic charge in a narrative determined by their potentiality to satisfy macrotextual goals. This is indeed the case with the *Liberata*, as the forest is the source of the *materia* that guarantees a successful end and also the source of obstacles that perpetuate a narrative. In the remainder of this chapter, the same is argued of some of the

³⁶⁴ *Allegoria*, 309.

³⁶⁵ Tasso, *Allegoria*, 304.

³⁶⁶ See letter 76 to Luca Scalabrino, dated to the spring of 1576, in *Le lettere di Torquato Tasso*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1854), 1:183-186, 1:185.

characters of the *Liberata*: in the best example, the Ethiopian warrior Clorinda is so often made a tool of military strategy that, even after her mistaken death, her soul is supposedly conjured into a tree to scare her beloved Tancredi from collecting wood.³⁶⁷ The instrumental vision of the forest extends from the teleological poetics behind the *Liberata*: as a source of *materia* that is at once building material for the Crusaders and subject matter for the poet, the narrative importance invested in the wood draws on the varied meanings of ὄλη, as forest, wood, content and the raw substance of potentiality. By linking the wooden *materia* within the fiction of the narrative to the poetic *materia* outside it, thereby literalizing poetic material as building material in the world of the poem, Tasso invites a metaliterary reading that sees in the forests of the *Liberata* a dramatization of the craft of poetry and in the Crusaders' constructions a self-reflexive symbol for the poem itself.

Importantly, though, these metapoetic constructions are built not of stone or textile, but wood. If every word was once a poem, as Emerson claims, then the history of the word ὄλη refers to an enormous signifying potential deep within the idea of wood. Aristotle's own poetic use of ὄλη in his metaphysical writings is an extremely apt metaphor for potentiality because wood itself is a metaphor, pliable, instrumental and absolutely dependent on form. Trees cannot be said to be composed of wood, and less so timber, without implying a conceptualization of the tree that already guarantees a certain potentiality. In Tasso's poem, the trees are pure potentiality, realized throughout as weapons, defenses and tombstones. These inventions, always inscribed with a clue to their metaliterary role, like the rhetoric of *materia*, are the product of a poetics of instrumentalization, itself derived from Tasso's meditation on the wooden link between natural philosophy and poetry. So while the forest does not stand for the variety of erroneous human discourses as the *Allegoria* asserts, there is

³⁶⁷ See *GL* 12.48-70 and 13.38-46 for the demise and reconstitution of Clorinda.

no doubt that it stands for something and this recognition of the forest's potential for allegorical meaning is precisely the point of the present study.

The *materia* of the *Liberata* is metaphoric potentiality embodied, finally realized in the penultimate canto. These instruments of the Crusaders' success mirror Tasso's endeavor to assemble interconnected, generically shaped metaphors, deployed as instruments in a battle over literary values. Such an ambition coheres with the function of literature espoused by the theoretical writings closest to the *Liberata*: the *Allegoria* reveals the schematic functionality of all the characters and settings, the *Arte poetica* dictates the genre-specific norms for the formation and arrangement of these elements and the *Lettere poetiche* reveal his efforts of editing the poem to ensure its theoretical orthodoxy. The drama of poetic construction that the forest acts out within the poem thus confirms the instrumental ethics Tasso installs around the poem. But if the forest is a metaliterary symbol for the potential for the poem to achieve compositional if not also moral perfection, it is not the one-sided allegory that Tasso himself proffers in the *Allegoria del poema*. Indeed, if Tasso is illustrating a perfectly instrumental poetics in the forest, he is careful to inscribe the cost of such commitment into the individual trees. Traces of the violence that characterizes the hierarchy of Aristotelian materialization are most manifest in the recurrent linking of individual trees with death. Throughout the poem's preoccupation with *materia*, tokens of death involving trees or wooden contrivances recur: the pyre for two innocent Christians (*GL* 2.33), the stockades and instruments of war themselves (described proudly in 18.41-45) and two funereal constructions, discussed below, that include the coffin and palm memorial of the slain Crusader Dudone. So if the forest as a whole acts out a literary realization, the individual trees testify to the violence of that transformational teleology.

A Metacharacter in Life and Death

As the previous section details, the forest serves as subject matter to Tasso at the same time it serves the Christians with wooden matter for their instruments of war. As with *materia nuda* in the *Arte poetica*, the *materia* in the *Liberata* needs to be put to use and redefined in terms of the function it potentially serves. One astounding example of this perspectives is seen in Goffredo's decision to have siege machines built out of trees after the Crusaders' first skirmish at Jerusalem, losing their celebrated mercenary Dudone. Goffredo's restless mind is plagued by the tactical needs for wooden material and his preoccupations tinge the narration of the funeral he oversees the next day:

Ma il capitan, ch'espugnar mai le mura
non crede senza i bellici tormenti,
pensa ond'abbia le travi, ed in quai forme
le machine componga; e poco dorme.

Sorse a pari co 'l sole, ed egli stesso
Seguir la pompa funeral poi volle.
A Dudon d'odorifero cipresso
composto hanno un sepolcro a piè d'un colle,
non lunge a gli steccati; e sovra ad esso
un'altissima palma i rami estolle.
Or qui fu posto, e i sacerdoti intanto
quiete a l'alma gli pregàr co 'l canto.

Quinci e quindi fra i rami erano appese
insegne e prigioniere arme diverse,
già da lui tolte in più felici imprese
a le genti di Siria ed a le perse.
De la corazza sua, de l'altro arnese,
in mezzo il grosso tronco si coperse.
«Qui» vi fu scritto poi «giace Dudone:
onorate l'altissimo campione.»

Ma il pietoso Buglion, poi che da questa
opra si tolse dolorosa e pia,
tutti i fabri del campo a la foresta
con buona scorta di soldati invia.
Ella è tra valli ascosa, e manifesta
l'avea fatta a i Francesi uomo di Soria.
Qui per troncar le machine n'andaro,
a cui non abbia la città riparo (*GL* 3.71-74).

Noteworthy is the prominence of trees in the staging of Dudone's funeral, the cypress coffin shaded by a mighty palm. All the trees here are instrumentalized: the funeral takes place near the Christians' wooden stockade, the odiferous cypress has been hewn into a coffin, the palm becomes a burial ground and its branches are redressed in funerary swaths. The palm's branches are festooned with his emblems and trophies and its trunk is covered with his equipment and inscriptions.

Read in the key of Tasso's poetic entelechy, the tree's transformation is striking: the monumental potential of the wooden material is completely realized into a form that determines its functionality. The scene's more literal application of words, the funerary inscription of Dudone's name in the bark, likewise completes the transformation of literary ornament into literary instrument. Like the trees that bore the coffin and the stockade, the redressed palm itself becomes *arnese*, equipment of the funeral proceedings. Indeed, the entire scene is colored by the perspective of Captain Goffredo, so preoccupied with military strategy that the night before the funeral he loses sleep worrying "ond'abbia le travi, ed in quai forme / le machine componga". The teleology of form haunts this episode, and immediately following the memorial, Goffredo sends his troops to "troncar le machine", to cut the machines out of the trees. As with *materia*, the choice of words here betrays the double Aristotelian attitude that sees trees as ready tools for a poetic operation. War machines waiting to be cut out from the trees — such a stunning vision of the forest coheres not only with the referentiality of the landscape that the *Allegoria* proposes, but also with the entire poetic entelechy implied by Tasso's choice of *materia* in the *Liberata*.

Two further appearances of individual trees — a talking cypress and a group of felled yews — merit extensive consideration, however, for not only do they exemplify the pattern

of instrumentalization that the *Arte poetica* articulates and that Dudone's funeral illustrates but they also give emotional admissions of this commitment by assuming a name. Unlike the memorial transformation of Dudone's palm tree, the application of a name to a tree in these later examples will problematize the narrative act by directing the reader's sympathy to the literary party represented by the tree, be it a character or — in the case the felled "tassi" — the author himself.

If the poem's diegetic action is also metaliterary action, an arc of pure causality satisfying contemporary debates on literary worth as an exemplarily united plot, then the telos of functional unity clearer is nowhere than in the character of Clorinda, who in her absolute subservience to the needs of the narrative, can be seen as a metacharacter that accedes to the teleology of the text, though not without her own supernatural protest. Her first appearance in the poem sets the pattern: covered all but for her face in foreign armor, Clorinda appears before the unsuspecting Crusader Tancredi, who stops at a spring in the forest:

[...] d'improvviso una donzella
tutta, fuor che la fronte, armata apparse:
era pagana, e là venuta anch'ella
per l'istessa cagion di ristorarse.
Egli mirolla, ed ammirò la bella
sembianza, e d'essa si compiacque, e n'arse.
[...]

Ella d'elmo coprissi, e se non era
ch'altri quivi arrivàr, ben l'assaliva.
Parti dal vinto suo la donna altera,
ch'è per necessità sol fuggitiva;
ma l'immagine sua bella e guerriera
tale ei serbò nel cor, qual essa è viva [...].

E ben nel volto suo la gente accorta
legger potria: «Questi arde, e fuor di spene» (*GL* 1.47-49).

Whatever identity this unnamed figure has is construed from without: her allegiance is determined by the foreign-seeming armor that covers her whole body and her motivation is

intimated by her location at a rest stop, while her entire appearance is continuously expressed through the verbs of Tancredi's spectatorship. To the objectifying gaze of the enamored soldier, her face emerges in the martial rhetoric typical of the mid sixteenth-century lyric patois that hardens around Francesco Petrarca's late fourteenth-century *canzoniere*: *altera, bella* twice over and quite literally a *guerriera*.³⁶⁸ Tancredi's vision, furthermore, repeats the trope of early vernacular lyrics in which the speaker-spectator, immediately afflicted with a fiery lovesickness, receives the image of the beloved as a living impression onto the heart. But here the effect of the pictorial transmission is textual and its legibility is expressed with clear echoes of Petrarca's lyric speaker, who bears in heart not his beloved's image but her name.³⁶⁹

So before the reader can find any depth behind the surfaces of this fleeting apparition, the ensemble of signifiers already classifies her as a love object and an enemy but, above all else, as an object of Tancredi's warring attentions in the central thematic conflict between erotic individualism and chaste unity. In her first appearance as elsewhere, then, Clorinda always surfaces in order to satisfy a conspicuous narratological objective, and always does so through the presentation of decipherable signs. Immediately coded as enemy and love object — categories both determined by an analysis of her form — Clorinda is a shell of a character, an empty form that will situate the poem's struggle between the united military macrotext advocated by Aristotelians and the individualist errancy of the romance genre.

Clorinda's next appearance is likewise mediated entirely through the eyes of her Christian onlookers:

³⁶⁸ There are echoes of *RVF* 129, where the lover's face is such that "uom di tal vita esperto / diria: «Questo arde, et di suo stato è incerto [...]»", and 35, where the lover says of his condition "di fuor si legge com'io dentro avampi". On the Petarchan cast of this scene see Paul Larivaille, *Poesia e ideologia. Letture della 'Gerusalemme Liberata'* (Naples: Liguori, 1987), 185.

³⁶⁹ In *RVF* 5, the speaker mentions the "nome che nel cor mi scrisse Amore".

[...] ecco un guerriero
(ché tal pareo) d'alta sembianza e degna;
e mostra, d'arme e d'abito straniero,
che di lontan peregrinando vegna.
La tigre, che su l'elmo ha per cimiero,
tutti gli occhi a sé trae, famosa insegna,
insegna usata da Clorinda in guerra;
onde la credon lei, né 'l creder erra (GL 2.38).

As earlier, she springs into the narrative and after her verbless arrival, the only agency Clorinda has here is that of signification and suggestion: she seemed (“parea”) to have a male’s stature, she displays (“mostra”) foreign equipment and she has on (“su [...] ha”) a tiger insigne that attracts the eyes of those around her (“tutti gli occhi a sé trae”). As a result of this overactive communicability, her essential identity is determined by a collective interpretation of these signs: she is only Clorinda insofar as her beholders “la credon lei” and that belief errs not. Her external form thus actualizes the *materia* it contains, perpetuating the pattern.

Draped in professional symbols, she routinely manifests from the vague East on an itinerary of pure narrative utility — “Viene or costei da le contrade perse”, the narrator informs, “perch’ a i cristiani a suo poter resista” (GL 2.41) — a utility she underlines while introducing herself to King Aladino. In her audience with Aladino, King of Jerusalem, to offer her services against the advancing Crusaders, she adds only her name and absolute serviceability to her highly recognizable appearance:

Io son Clorinda: [...] hai forse intesa
talor nomarmi; e qui, signor, ne vegno
per ritrovarmi teco a la difesa
de la fede comune e del tuo regno.
Son pronta, imponi pure, ad ogni impresa:
l’alte non temo, e l’umili non sdegno;
vogliami in campo aperto, o pure tra ‘l chiuso
de le mura impiegar, nulla ricuso (GL 2.46).

If she had first seemed to Paul Larivaille to Tancredi a formal literalization of Petrarca's warlike love object,³⁷⁰ she presents herself to Aladino as the embodiment of a virtuous military hero. This introduction is the character's admission of her essential functionality: "imponi pure", she urges, to king and author alike. The instantaneous desirability that defined her first appearance to Tancredi (and the reader), coupled with the unconditional military availability she reveals here, marks Clorinda as the perfect literary instrument.

But her act of naming admits the underside of the dynamic, for when she claims, *Io son Clorinda, hai forse intesa talor nomarmi*, covered in insignia, she points to an essential lack beneath those signifiers. The person behind the legendary name Clorinda, beneath the coded armor or Petrarchan body, is left very much a mystery. For instance, she does not participate in the amorous thematics that her form brings about and her racial and religious heritage remain unknown to her until shortly before her death (*GL* 12.20-42), inspiring little response until her dying request for baptism (12.66). The unconvincing religiosity of Clorinda is instead a fascinating justification for whatever slim personality was visible behind the armor, the heroic infidel archetype that Tasso resolves with her latent Christian virtue. Whatever she might stand for, Clorinda's *materia* has no effect without the form that construes her presence and in three further restagings the form is actualized with less and less correspondence to the apposite *materia*.

In the following conjuring of Clorinda, Erminia, princess of Antioch, disguises herself in Clorinda's armor in order to flee Aladino's compound. Covered with the warrior's characteristic symbols, Erminia utters the password that activates her adopted form: "Io son Clorinda, [...] apri la porta, / ché 'l re m'invia dove l'andare importa" (*GL* 6.95). The echo of the first introduction is unmistakable and, seen together with Clorinda's earlier appearances,

³⁷⁰ See *Poesia e ideologia*, 185.

these acts of naming confirm the pattern based on instrumental perceptions of her form. Free indirect discourse reflects the guard's deception — “chi crederia veder armata in sella / una de l'altre ch'arme oprar non sanno?” (*GL* 6.96) — while advancing the thematics of Clorinda's mendacious surfaces. As Walter Stephens observes her zero-shaped birthmark nullifies the white-skinned body born of black-skinned Christians and negates her value in the good/evil, Christian/infidel binaries of the heroic epic,³⁷¹ binaries that her racial and religious conversion nonetheless confirms.

The relationship between *materia* and form is recast in negative when Clorinda finds herself locked out of the compound in “ruginose e nere” armor, “senza piuma o fregio” (*GL* 12.18), which she had adopted for an anonymous attack. She is again met with Tancredi's objectifying gaze, which tracks her now not as a love object but as adversary. As in her earlier appearances, the combination of symbols and a name construes the functional identity that Clorinda adopts. Her armor codes her as a faceless enemy inspiring Tancredi to ask for her name, for pure knowledge's sake:

pregoti (se fra l'arme han loco i preghi)
che 'l tuo nome e 'l tuo stato a me tu scopra,
acciò ch'io sappia, o vinto o vinctore,
chi la mia morte o la vittoria onore (*GL* 12.60).

Her response to Tancredi's query for her name conveys a similar anonymity:

[...] Indarno chiedi
quel c'ho per uso di non far palese.
Ma chiunque io mi sia, tu inanzi vedi
un di quei due che la gran torre accese (*GL* 12.61).

The identity she provides, her tactical taunt, is again narratologically determined and replaces her personality with a typology: her identity is only that of his enemy. Tragically, the stratagem invites Tancredi's fatal attack and, once her visor is lifted, he descends into grief.

³⁷¹ Walter Stephens, “Tasso's Heliodorus and the World of Romance”, in James Tatum, ed., *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994), 67-87, 72-75.

As in her first appearance, an explosion of Petrarchan language is marshaled to describe body, now dying, fragmented into a mournful blazon. While the Christians' spiritual advisor, the hermit Piero, urges him to interpret the misfortune as a message — “Questa sciagura tua del Cielo è un messo; / non vedi lui? non odi i detti suoi?” (GL 12.86) — Tancredi remains profoundly shaken by the fatal case of mistaken identity brought about through his subjective reading of symbols.

The unwitting slaughter of Clorinda furthers a major metapoetic goal in that it delivers a decisive defeat to the amorous thematics jockeying for prominence alongside the more centralized martial macronarrative in the sixteenth-century conception of narrative poetry.³⁷² While the episode demands multiple interpretations, on a metaliterary level Tancredi's unsuspecting killing of his beloved confirms a hierarchy of the military over the erotic, the heroic poem over the erotic romance. Clorinda leaves the poem just as she enters it: as a vessel for narrative instrumentalization. The archenemy whose bold introduction to King Aladino betrays the same overt narrative serviceability as her dying wish for baptism. Be it a famed warrior, an anonymous assailant, a Petrarchan love-object or a problematically familiar foreigner, Clorinda must always adopt her identity to the macrotextual roles required of her. These roles are articulated through the gazes of her onlookers, who must read and respond to the signs of her external manifestations.

Specifically, her onlookers must hear a name, part of the formula that activates the *materia*: while the affirmative *Io son Clorinda* opened doors to and from Aladino's compound, the negatory *chiunque io mi sia* is similarly effective, inviting Tancredi's fatal attack. But as with her depersonalizing offer of service to the king, her act of naming admits

³⁷² The combination of the two narrative strains is the self-purported triumph of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, with its immortal opening chiasmus, “Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto”.

the essential instrumentality of her character, defined above all by military tactic. Her refusal to name herself, then, is a decision to advance an identity based on narrative functionality rather than a personal “origin”.³⁷³ All of these conjurations obey the same schematic of formalization: the physical *materia* — Clorinda’s real, fake and otherwise — submits to the expectations of the *forma*, the generic position of enemy soldier, compatriot or love object, articulated by her readable surfaces. The actualization transpires regardless of the armor’s actual inhabitant, as Erminia and Clorinda learn from disparate outcomes, and this indiscrimination is the violence of an instrumental poetics that reduces its characters into roles, its actions into itineraries of pure narrative functionality.

If a disguised Erminia demonstrates that the warrior’s effective presence can be conjured with the right ensemble of signifiers and a final act of naming, Clorinda outside the castle shows that it *must* be so conjured, since the wrong symbols and an inadequate naming cannot make her presence visible. With her dependence on the recognition of others and with the unabashed narrative availability she displays in her introduction to Aladino, Clorinda functions as a metacharacter and her storylines turn on changes that clearly satisfy poetic goals. As a potential amorous distraction, the death she invites by naming herself as a combatant definitively establishes the priority of the martial tradition in narrative poetry while, as a problematically virtuous Muslim, she begs for a conversion that congratulates a Christian readership.³⁷⁴ All potential and no personality, she has become the most transparent tool in a theoretically grounded poetics and, in the course of her appearances, real or

³⁷³ So argues Valeria Finucci, “Maternal Imagination and Monstrous Birth: Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*”, in Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee, eds., *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 41-77, 77.

³⁷⁴ Clorinda’s conversion is foreshadowed by the delayed revelation of her heritage as the light-skinned offspring of dark-skinned Ethiopian Christians, resolving in a drama of forms her ‘*ibridazione tra forma assunta e forma autentica*’, in the words of Fredi Chiappelli, *Il conoscitore del caos. Una «vis abdit» nel linguaggio tassesco* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1981), 62.

simulated, none so perfectly captures her narrative instrumentalization as perfectly her last appearance, as a simulacrum in a cypress tree.

Clorinda's final incarnation will fit the same pattern and, once again, the act of naming will underscore the brutality of the poetics. As with Dudone's coffin, the cypress in the demonic underworld serves a tactical function, as a tool in Ismeno's magic defense of the forest. In canto 13, a numerical position with Dantesque implications, Tancredi returns from Clorinda's tomb and volunteers to penetrate the woods and, having reasoned that the imposing wall of fire on the edge of the thicket "fia d'effetto minor che di sembianza" (*GL* 13.35), he passes through it unharmed and is unmolested by Ismeno's phantasms. In this eerily calm landscape he finds a clearing, lured there by an imposing cypress carved with hieroglyphs demanding respect for the surrounding burial ground. Disturbed by hidden voices, Tancredi strikes the cypress until it cries out in pain:

[...] Ahi! troppo [...]
m'hai tu, Tancredi, offeso; or tanto basti.
Tu dal corpo che meco e per me visse,
felice albergo già, mi discacciasti:
perché il misero tronco, a cui m'affisse
il mio duro destino, anco mi guasti?
Dopo la morte gli avversari tuoi,
crudel, ne' lor sepolcri offender vuoi?

Clorinda fui, né sol qui spirto umano
albergo in questa pianta rozza e dura (*GL* 13.42-43).

He reacts in a fevered state without truly believing his eyes:

Qual l'infermo talor ch'in sogno scorge
drago o cinta di fiamme alta Chimera,
se ben sospetta o in parte anco s'accorge
che 'l simulacro sia non forma vera,
pur desia di fuggir, tanto gli porge
spavento la sembianza orrida e fera,
tal il timido amante a pien non crede
a i falsi inganni, e pur ne teme e cede (*GL* 13.44) .

In a tableau of errancy, Tancredi drops his sword and retreats, leaving the forest to be disenchanted by the only remaining Christian hero, Rinaldo, whose return to the fold will keep the narrative afloat for another five cantos.

The episode in the forest has been subject to many different readings, often embracing a larger literary history. Tasso's talking tree resembles, among others, similar inventions in Vergil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Commedia*, not to mention the embodied tree that figures in the *Furioso*. Indeed, the unadulterated errancy of Ariosto's take on the trope would have lent the air of pure romance to a tree that should talk in its wake, an erotic element that the *Liberata* again decisively cuts down. But rather than seeking out motivations for Tasso's program of revision of classical and contemporary sources, would not a more engaging question ask what about the tree warranted attention in the first place? That is, are there any discernable charges within or around the tree that would have called out their suitability for this final incarnation of Clorinda, charges specific to the environment of the *Liberata* that might have preceded any purposeful revision of Tasso's literary forebears? Recalling the arguments presented above concerning the forest and other trees, the cypress tree offers the poem a last chance to exploit Clorinda as an instrument in a narrative of formation.

Like her trademark armor, this final shell of Clorinda's presence is covered in symbols that her onlookers must read and interpret. Her symbol-studded surface is literally read, as Tancredi distinguishes the Arabic characters from the hieroglyphs carved into the bark to learn of the tree's funereal function. The enchanted form achieves its intended effect, as always, with a name. Like Erminia's feminine pronunciation, the "distinto" (*GL* 13.42) voice that issues from the cypress convincingly delivers the password that activates the form: "Clorinda fui", it sighs at the beginning of a second octave, the final permuted echo of the

introduction *Io son Clorinda*, no less problematic than the original. Again, this is not Clorinda speaking: it is a simulacrum conjured specifically to ward off the intruding Crusaders. But just as with Erminia or the disguised Clorinda, the *materia* doesn't matter and the functional of the form, here a sort of personalized scarecrow, determines the onlooker's response. And just as with Clorinda's initial offer of service to her military and narrative commanders, this introduction is also directed beyond the page, to the narrator who authorized her harsh destiny. Here she protests the poetic teleology that has subjected her *materia* to numerous disastrous transformations, from recognizable soldier to anonymous enemy, from suspiciously virtuous infidel to suffering Christian, and from body, presumably, to tree trunk.

As with earlier acts of naming, this episode completes the process of signification required by the form, as it moves Tancredi to drop his sword and retreat. The permutation of this password, though, reinforces the disorientation and loss of the transformative poetics: "Clorinda fui", the voice utters surely but later admits, "non so s'io dica in corpo o in sepoltura" (*GL* 13.43). Ismeno's tactical counterfeit of Clorinda is all too fitting an end to a succession of similarly instrumental situations that the narrative shaped for her. For in her final appearance in a drama of literary entelechy, no invention could have demonstrated the poem's violent teleology more poignantly than having its most serviceable character incarnate the most malleable *materia*: a tree in the forest, linked by etymology to the stuff of unmade souls, the metaphysical equivalents of stock characters. After her transplantation from one armored form to another leads to the death and conversion that Tasso's theoretically committed poem requires, she returns in the material that could most expect a parallel exploitation. The metatextual hue of wooden matter responds perfectly to the metanarrative

functionality of Clorinda, giving body to an accusation against the instrumental poetics that brought it into being by addressing both character and author at once.

Cutting Down the Family Tree

But beyond an apt conclusion of Clorinda's trajectory of instrumentalization, this haunted cypress episode also reveals the *Liberata's* teleological vision of the forest, that sees machines for the trees. Indeed, the scene where the Crusaders first head to "troncar le machine" offers a useful comparison to the demonic forest, where, in a similarly disturbing context of instrumentalization, more trees are named victims:

L'un l'altro essorta che le piante atteri,
e faccia al bosco inusitati oltraggi.
Caggion recise da i pungenti ferri
le sacre palme e i frassini selvaggi,
i funebri cipressi e i pini e i cerri,
l'elci frondose e gli alti abeti e i faggi,
gli olmi mariti, a cui talor s'appoggia
la vite, e con pié torto al ciel se 'n poggia.

Altri i tassi, e le quercie altri percote,
che mille volte rinovâr le chiome,
e mille volte ad ogni incontro immote
l'ire de' venti han rintuzzate e dome;
ed altri impone a le stridenti rote
d'orni e di cedri l'odorate some.
Lasciano al suon de l'arme, al vario grido
e le fêre e gli augei la tana e 'l nido (GL 3.75-76).

This catalogue of highly personalized trees closes the canto, and prominently placed in this closing image are the yew trees ("tassi") that are homonyms of the author's last name.

That these trees refer to Tasso's own name is indisputable. In one of his earliest sonnets, a meditation on his newfound literary company composed by 1566, he imagines a "vil Tasso" transplanted into the nourishing soil of his patron Scipione Gonzaga where it is able to yield sweeter fruit:

Poi che'n vostro terren vil Tasso alberga
Dal Ren traslato, ond'empia man lo svelse,
Là've par, ch'egualmente homai l'eccelse
Piante, e le basse horrida pioggia asperga;

S'ègli già fù negletta, & humil verga,
 Hor mercè di colui, che qui lo scelse
 Fra' suoi be' lauri, e propria cura felse,
 Tosto averrà, ch'al Ciel pregiato s'erga.
 E caldi raggi raggi, e fresch'aure, e rugiade
 Pure n'attende à maturar possenti
 E raddolcir l'amate frutta acerbe:
 Onde il lor succo à l'Api schise aggrade,
 E mel ne stilli, che si pregi, e serbe
 Poscia in Parnaso à le future genti.³⁷⁵

For Eleanora Stoppino, a claim in Tasso's *Arte poetica* that Ariosto should be "tassato" for a certain flaw also "induce alcune — caute — considerazioni" about the poet's surname,³⁷⁶ considerations treated quite incautiously in Achille Campanile's 1973 essay imagining the poet with a pet badger, "il tasso del Tasso".³⁷⁷ But what reference are readers to draw from the yews in the *Liberata*, not transplanted but, indeed, cut down? The dynamic of instrumentalization that Clorinda undergoes, inside and outside the trees, is fundamental here as well, though it is not the character to be molded by the teleology of the genre but the author and his family.

Tasso's writing about his own poem, before and after its publication, suggests that the expectations of literary society had a significant effect on him personally. In his correspondence with his editors during the preparation of the *Liberata*, one letter after another betrays his frustration with the compositional process: he mentions a severe headache that sets in as he drafts canto summaries, his embarrassment over misquoting Homer, the verses that creep into his hypnagogia and his worries over the editors' attention to his single queries or entire letters.³⁷⁸ During his seven-year imprisonment at the Ospedale Sant'Anna in Ferrara, he wrote elaborate defences of his poem's worth. With these and other contributions

³⁷⁵ See Torquato Tasso, *Rime 'eteree'*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Parma: Zara, 1990), 69v.

³⁷⁶ See Eleonora Stoppino, "'Onde è tassato l'Ariosto'. Appunti sulla tradizione del romanzo nella *Gerusalemme liberata*", *Strumenti critici* 16(2): 225-244, 225.

³⁷⁷ Achille Campanile, "La quercia del Tasso", in *Opere*, ed. Oreste del Buono (Milan: Bompiani, 1989), 2:1087-1089, 2:1088.

³⁷⁸ See letters 10, 15, 31, 8, 7, respectively, in *Lettere poetiche*.

to the debate, Tasso makes himself a player in larger discourse about literary virtue. So if the yew tree already served the young Tasso as a personal literary *impresa*,³⁷⁹ the felled yews in the *Liberata* surely admit the more mature poet's subjection to the popular and critical forces influencing literary production. He too becomes an instrument, a weapon in the battle over the virtues of heroic poetry, and the *tassi* offer a memorial to the poet who had in youth used the same tree to wish for the opportunity that have proved so destructive.

But it is not one *tasso* that falls for heroic ends in the *Liberata* but instead a family of "tassi". Torquato's father Bernardo Tasso was also a court poet who contributed to the literary debates with various letters and his 1562 *Ragionamento della poesia*. Bernardo's narrative epic *Amadigi*, which evolved over time but was only concluded posthumously by Torquato, provides a case of the destructive influence of popular taste. Torquato recounts in the *Apologia* that an overly Aristotelian version of the *Amadigi* drove courtiers from their seats and inspired his father to rewrite the poem around a looser Ariostean structure.³⁸⁰ He saw upbraids of his father in several publications, among them Camillo Pellegrini's 1584 *Caraffa*, all under the theoretical rubric of epic poetry. Addressing these attacks by name in the *Apologia*, Tasso claims that any misappreciation of the *Amadigi* deals his father a second death: "Et perche mio Padre, il quale è morto nel sepolcro si puo dir vivo nel poema; chi cerca d'offender la sua poesia, procura dargli morte un'altra volta".³⁸¹ This protest of abuse beyond the grave eerily echoes the haunted cypress that voices Clorinda's victimization in the *Liberata* and also recalls the tenderness of the space where the *tassi* fall.

³⁷⁹ Agostino Casu, "«Traslata proficit arbos». Le imprese 'eteree' nelle *Rime* del Tasso", *Italique* 2 (1999): 82-111, 95.

³⁸⁰ *Apologia*, A^{4v}.

³⁸¹ *Apologia*, A^{3v}.

But absolving his father's poetry while defending his own proves a difficult needle to thread and to preserve the primacy of heroic poetry he must distinguish his father's romance as inferior to his Christian epic: Torquato's *Apologia* addresses exactly such attacks but he can only defend his father's poetry by insisting that the author of a romance faces the same content as an epic poet but "dee scrivere questa materia diversam[en]te".³⁸² The generic recategorization is for Sergio Zatti a "parricidio",³⁸³ which Torquato himself suggests, musing that if his father "voleva pur esser superato non voleva esser superato da nissun'altro, che da me".³⁸⁴ The filial reverence and rivalry notable here may well have been foreshadowed by the fallen yew trees in the *Liberata*. For the trees are a family, given the emphasis on the personalities and relationships upset by the Crusaders' destruction: the elm was husband to the vine, the beasts and birds had homes, the oaks engaged in timeless confrontation with the winds. And the younger Tasso did indeed spring from the elder's cone: Torquato's first exercise in the chivalric genre was largely inspired — and publicized — by his father.³⁸⁵ When the *tassi* become instruments of war, their trajectory matches that of the *Tassi* who serve in a literary conflict greater than their family.

As with Clorinda, this act of naming memorializes the individual poets instrumentalized by the literary debates in which they both participated. So while these yew trees are included in the poem for their potential to construct a successful Christian poetics, the attention paid to their fall memorializes the toll the theoretical commitments takes on both poets, whose name and relationship are routinely deployed to advance generic positions, even by the poets themselves. In a theatre of war, husband, father, nest and self all become

³⁸² *Apologia*, A⁵r.

³⁸³ Zatti, *L'ombra del Tasso*, 4.

³⁸⁴ *Apologia*, B³v.

³⁸⁵ Sherberg, "Introduzione", 11-25.

instruments of attack. Seen together the cypress and yew trees, memorials to the instrumental poetics that exploited them, also say something about the arboreal material of their memorial. Surely, they are not the only trees in the poem to meet destructive ends, with all the Crusaders' wooden equipment or *materiel*, in military jargon. They are not even the only trees to bear a memorial function, given Dudone's tomb. What binds Clorinda's cypress to the yews is the self-aware instrumentality behind each invention. The character with such a keen ability to voice her narrative subjugation is made to do so last from the substance that most literally expresses her poetic position: wood, not tree fibers but implied construction material. With its poetics of instrumentalization, then, the epithet for lumber throughout the *Liberata* —*materia* — unites Aristotle's principles of poetic composition and metaphysical generation to the texture that is already a metaphor for each. Wood is the ultimate *materia*, not only for literal constructions but for figurative ones as well and the two named trees of interest here admit this exploitability. What better place to bury such malleable characters than in pure matter?

The forest in the *Liberata*, at last, does act out a formalization similar to the one prescribed by the *Arte poetica* for subject matter: it is described in terms of its "machine", it is shaped according to narrative need and it is perfected as an instrument of Christian victory. The same dynamic awaits many other elements of the poem: Clorinda's conversion, the unification of the Crusader army, the liberation of Jerusalem, the sugar-coated medicine. While all these dynamics cooperate and coexist as products of a totalizing reading of Aristotle's poetics and metaphysics, they are not promoted absolutely. The trees follow the same pattern as their containing forests but in two horrific moments they are given space to name the violence that the narrative instrumentalization entails. The character so easily

conjured and dismissed protests her author's unforgiving teleology, doing so in an arboreal vehicle that mimics her metaphoric body, destined to refer to something else. The poet and the father that nurtured his talents are similarly planted in the military occupation of the forest that mirrors the theoretical conflict over poetry that made them both instruments of ideological agendas.



From its plot to its style to its settings, the *Liberata* is poem about literary instrumentalization, a drama that is restaged with every use of the word “*materia*”, which, when appearing alongside derivatives of the more neutral *legno*, suggest the trees as matter in a larger narrative objective of giving form to matter. Such is the valence the term enjoys in the *Arte poetica*, which inspires the stubborn choice of the antiquated *materia* in the poem and which reflects a totalizing meditation on Aristotle's philosophies of matter and poetry. But if the lexical choice is awkward to the ear, it triumphs on the page as an invention that literalizes and dramatizes the three major meanings of *materia*: textually as wood, metatextually as subject matter, contextually as raw matter. It is a masterful example not only of what Pier Massimo Forni would call the language knowing the story but also of a language being wholly consanguineous with the story.³⁸⁶ For on the level of plot, the forest is instrumentalized also: be it in the funerary rites of a fallen soldier, in pursuit of war machines, in efforts to contain the horrific display of the magic and sexual frustration characteristic of romance, in situating a story in the perfect transitional landscape between verisimilitude and poetic justice. More than a mere metaliterary symbol, these considerations of *materia* of the *Liberata* offer a useful entrée into Tasso's theorization of literature. For if

³⁸⁶ The phrase derives from Forni's metaliterary analysis of the *Decameron*; see *Forme complesse nel Decameron* (Florence: Olschki, 1992), 79.

the forest reflects the subject matter that the poem plans to shape into an appropriate form, this space also reveals the process that Tasso would have imagined as the ideal embodiment of his theoretic principles and the victims of such commitment, himself included.

But as this dissertation has shown, Tasso is not the first to draw on the communicability between the forest and the poetic text. The inscribed trees that narrate the central episode of the *Furioso* reflect a similar meditation on the role the forest played in shaping the romance genre over the centuries. Nor is Tasso's meditation on the three valences of *ύλη* entirely unique, as a similar compression of significance also informs Dante's "selva oscura" (*Inf.* 1.2), a literalization of his youthful erotic lyricism from which to ascend to God. Tasso's originality instead consists in his integration of both the metaphysical aspects of the forest with its metaliterary potential into his own complex poetics of instrumentalization, one that presents carpentry as its prime self-definition. The present considerations of the poem's forest and its trees in light of the *Arte poetica*'s shipbuilding poetics offers insight into the literary project behind both works, through a lexical wrinkle that had heretofore not been duly unfolded.

So what might such a reading do for Tasso scholarship and beyond? One contribution is that it uncovers the extent of the theoretical charge that motivated the composition of the *Liberata*. Scholarship on the *Liberata* has often introduced Tasso's theoretical writings but, with the exception of Cavallin's study, has never considered *materia* a path between the two. But the word and all its instrumentality are indeed a connection between a theory that proposes a carpenter's handling of imperfect material and a poem that dramatizes the struggle to craft war machines from haunted wood. The Crusaders' successful use of their machines concludes a narrative of instrumentalization that leaves traces of its process here and there

but which, again, has never been fully explored. Further, the study of Tasso's poetics of entelechy derives from his totalizing reading of Aristotle, which if confirmed by other poetic inventions would add depth to the critical understanding of his Aristotelianism.

But these readings can also serve as a small step in a larger cultural history of overlaps between ecological and literary perception: Aristotle's use of *ὑλη*, the subject of Tasso's musing, is an invention that depends on the pre-historic connections between plants and language, a communicability similar to the impulse that let some anonymous Greek liken a collection of verse to an *ανθολογία*, a flower-binding? Despite Tasso's remark to his confidant that the *Allegoria* is risibly prescriptive, the claim in that gloss that the forest represents erroneous human discourse may not be so laughable after all, given that a long tradition in Italian literature, from Bonagiunta and Dante to Arisoto and beyond, imagines the forest as a stand-in for the literary project at hand. Like works of earlier authors, the *Liberata* offers yet another instance where the landscape is a mirror to the author at work creating a world, grounded in that very landscape, where a *favola* can be formed.

Conclusion: *Uscir del boscho*

“I made it through the wilderness
Somehow I made it through”
Madonna, *Like a Virgin*³⁸⁷



Having thus examined the forests presented in the four individual works for their potential for metaliterary significance, readers may ask what general history of the trope can be synthesized from these four examinations. If each of the forest inventions can be read as commenting on each writer’s own conception of the practice of literary composition — be it Dante’s and Tasso’s promotion of a moral hierarchy or Boccaccio and Ariosto’s amoral meditation on the ecological operation of narration — then what might the four comments seen together say about the changing philosophies of literature in early modern Italy? One significant observation made possible by reviewing these four readings together is the extent to which the two later writers depict the resistance of the narrative elements against the very project exploiting them. Readers can sense the later poets’ fascination with the inconvenient vitality of literary structures like character and setting by staging two brief thematic contrasts: first, between Tasso’s macabre conjuration of a metaphysical poetic hierarchy and the same hierarchy unproblematically established by Dante and, second, between the obedient forests of the *Decameron* and the overactive woods of the *Furioso*.

Alongside the rigorously doctrinal diegetic narrative of the *Commedia*, Dante also crafts a metaliterary narrative about the composition of his own poem which presents no less stringent an ideology: in the story that recounts the elevation of a poet from earthly lyric to divine epic, the value of narrative elements like character and setting remains tied to the narrative principles and readers are not expected to challenge such a vision of poetry. The

³⁸⁷ The title track is third on Madonna’s 1984 album *Like a Virgin* (Sire/Warner Bros.).

figure of Pier della Vigna (*Inf.* 13.22-108), for instance, presents a metaliterary figure seemingly aware of his own transformation from historical person to narrative character. Dante's Pier, once *uomo* but now *sterpo*,³⁸⁸ is a complex character who is nonetheless presented within Dante's uncompromising moral cosmology, centered on divine love.³⁸⁹ The entire material world of the *Commedia*, including its environments and its population, is consequently defined by its distance from this center and Pier's position is no different from the other undeniably virtuous citizens of the *Inferno*, like that of Brunetto Latini (*Inf.* 15.22-124) and Ulisse (20.26.46-142):³⁹⁰ incongruous with their squalid surroundings, the nobility they exhibit only underscores the justice of a divine punishment that would condemn characters otherwise notable for their obvious nobility.

The divinely centered cosmology evident in the diegetic narrative is mirrored in the metaliterary narrative as well, particularly in its forest settings. As the first chapter details, Dante's simultaneous conjuration of forests, texts and metaphysical baseness is not his original invention but one he derives from his overarching literary model, Augustine's *Confessiones*, where the speaker describes his disillusionment with Platonic texts as a "regio dissimilitudinis", a forest that through etymological associations obvious in the Latin is easily made to represent an immoral or somehow pre-moral text.³⁹¹ Dante's innovation thus lies in having selected Augustine's metaphor as the basis of his own metaphysical poetics, where the *selva* that represents an unformed, amoral poetic project is contrasted with the vision of the universe as a book, representing a divinely inspired poetics. As the first chapter

³⁸⁸ See Pier's description in *Inf.* 13.37 that "Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi".

³⁸⁹ On the centrality of love – which "sementa in voi d'ogne virtute / e d'ogne operazione che merta pene" (*Purg.* 17.104-105) – in the organization of the cosmos in the *Commedia*, see the description of the underworld made by Dante's Virgilio in *Inf.* 11.22-66.

³⁹⁰ On the nobility of the character of Latini in the *Commedia* see Thomas Nevin, "Ser Brunetto's Immortality: *Inferno* XV", *Dante Studies* 96 (1978): 21-37, 21-23. On the admirable Ulisse see Mario Fubini, *Il peccato di Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966), 1-76.

³⁹¹ See Augustine's *Confessiones* 7.10.16.

of this dissertation has detailed, the settings bookending this metaliterary narrative in *Inferno* 1 and *Paradiso* 33 present the two poles of Dante's hierarchical poetics: the "selva oscura" (*Inf.* 1.2) represents the earthly poet's preoccupation with the material or content of his lyric expressions and its potential *guiderdone*,³⁹² while the vision of the universe as a book (*Par.* 33.85-87) demonstrates his elevation to a transcendent formal perfection. Even the serenely ordered forest that marks the midway point along this conversion, the "divina foresta" (*Purg.* 28.2) atop Mount Purgatorio most unlike the chaotic infernal "selva", names in its etymology the passage away from the highly material operation of literalization, the vehicle of a metaphor — *foris*, in Latin³⁹³ — to the realm of the tenor or *intus*, a more interior poetics of evocation. At no point in the *Commedia* are readers given internal suggestions to question the ideology that has turned Pier della Vigna into a tree — even in the face of doctrinal heterodoxy — or the literary ambition that posits the lofty vision of the world as a bound volume, the antipode to the ultimate forest texture of this earth. Quite the opposite, in fact: Dante's characters regularly confirm the poetic justice behind their own transformations.

The poetic hierarchy Tasso replicates is not nearly as neat, though it, like Dante's, does unequivocally prioritize the literary ideology over any intrinsic worth held by characters or setting. In Tasso's theoretical writings, poetic *materia* is repeatedly described according to an Aristotelian hierarchy, which demands that without all the necessary conditions "non è la materia capace di perfezione",³⁹⁴ and the agency by which this *materia* is brought to perfection is exclusively the poet's, described as an *artifex*.³⁹⁵ Readers are thus invited to

³⁹² On the expectation of a reward or *guiderdone* for a poetic composition that is characteristic of Dante's pre-conversion life, as depicted in the *Vita nova*, see Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds*, 95. On the poetic *guizardon* in Provençal lyric see Bond, "Origins", 245.

³⁹³ On the etymology of *foresta* see Makkonen, "Forst-sanan alkuperä", 19.

³⁹⁴ Tasso, *Arte poetica* 1, in Poma, ed., 10.

³⁹⁵ See *Arte poetica* 2, in Poma, ed., 36, for Tasso's description of the poet as an "Artefice".

read the characteristics of the *materia* from the treatise in the *materia* of the *Gerusalemme liberata*, a poem that uses this word for lumber far more often any contemporaneous or preceding vernacular epics.³⁹⁶ Again like Dante, Tasso draws out of the overlapping notions of forests, texts and baseness a clear poetic hierarchy: the immature and morally dangerous *materia* that typically arises out of the forests of chivalric narratives must be subjugated to the objectives of a central narrative with a stringent ideological *forma*.

Tasso's divergence from this Dantesque metaphysical poetics, however, lies in his poem's deliberate generation of pathos when presenting the victims of its own compositional prioritization. Such attention is exemplified by the metaliterary evocations inscribed into both the poem's forest setting and its most exploited hero, Clorinda. In the poem's first depiction of the search for lumber (*GL* 3.74-76), Tasso crafts a highly pathetic scene of deforestation that closes on a pair of felled yew trees, the *tassi* homonymous with the two *Tassi*, Torquato and his father Bernardo Tasso, who each paid severe personal costs for their obedience to literary philosophy.³⁹⁷ The yew trees mirror the dynamic imposed on the character of Clorinda, whose presence is manufactured multiple times but never as gruesomely as in a cursed cypress (*GL* 13.42-43), a tree transformed into a weapon, destined to become lumber for a second weapon, in the simultaneous diegetic and metaliterary campaigns waged in the *Liberata*. After the Crusader Tancredi slashes the tree (*GL* 13.41), the demonic simulacrum of Clorinda within it accuses her tormenters — the soldier but also the poet that scripts the soldier's motions — of exploiting her even in her tomb, a wooden tomb that neatly aligns the semantic concepts of forests, the metaphysical concept of instrumentalizable material and the

³⁹⁶ For *materia* in the *Liberata* see *GL* 13.1, 13.17, 13.50, 18.3 and 18.41. Contemporary poems use *materia* in this regard very infrequently; the sole example in Gian Giorigo Trissino's *Italia liberata dai goti* is in book 21.

³⁹⁷ Torquato himself describes his father's clash with an Aristotelian public in his *Apologia*; see *Apologia*, A^{4v}. For an account of Tasso's own literary anxieties see especially his *Lettere poetiche*.

metaliterary invention of narrative stuff. Despite the eventual surrender of the forest to the Crusaders' military ambitions and the poet's literary ideology, these scenes specifically depict the forest's *materia* as a victim and, furthermore, a victim seemingly aware of its victimhood. Unlike the *Commedia*, then, the *Liberata* challenges the legitimacy of its own stringent philosophy by giving voice to the deleterious effects of such orthodoxy.

Readers who find in Tasso's forest the deliberate nuancing of a hierarchy that understands setting only as a base literary instrument awaiting exploitation, a representation Dante had not tempered with such empathy, can also find a similar contrast in the attention paid by Boccaccio and Ariosto to the vitality of setting as a poetic structure. The forest settings that the *Decameron* represents as clockwork the *Furioso* instead lets run wild. In the highly controlled and *artificioso* world of the macronarrative in Boccaccio's macrotext,³⁹⁸ the forest serves the narrators as a respite from the restraints of thematic boundaries. The mistress of ceremonies for the ninth day of storytelling tells her fellow narrators to literally then figuratively frolic in the forest of their imagination, having them visit an actual forest before they free themselves from the yoke of thematic constraints. As the second chapter demonstrates, the *Decameron* represents its narrative organization as a spatial system, most notably when Elissa likens the thematic field restricting the day's storytelling to the perfectly proportional garden in which she and her fellow storytellers are situated:

Ampissimo campo è quello per lo quale noi oggi spaziando andiamo, né ce n'è alcuno che, non che uno aringo ma diece non ci potesse assai leggiemente correre, sí copioso l'ha fatto la fortuna delle sue nuove e gravi cose (*Dec.* 2.8.3).

For the ninth day, the narrators are invited by their queen to enter first an actual forest and then the forest of their imagination — but only temporarily. The forest is thus only functional

³⁹⁸ For the adjective used to *artificioso* to describe the gardens where most of the macronarrative is situated see for example *Dec.* 3.α.10 and 6.ω.20.

as it provides a break from the gardens and their extremely formal conversational practices, the controlled environments to which the narrators will return for their final, and most narrowly restricted, storytelling exercise. But the opportunity to flee boundaries that the forest presents is in fact built directly into the internal organization of *Decameron*, with Dioneo claiming a fixed space in each day's storytelling sequence for the explicit purpose of deviating from the prescribed constraints.³⁹⁹ The vision of literary structures that the *Decameron* presents, then, admits a fixed degree of chaos and autonomy into its system but keeps the narrative's own centrifugal rhythms under the heavy hand of the landscaper-like author.⁴⁰⁰

The forest in the macronarrative thus represents the opportunity for infinite narrative potential within a finite narrative space, the same opportunity it presents within the micronarratives. The forests of the *Decameron's* tales are remarkable for the efficiency with which they generate narrative developments: brief tales like those of Talano d'Imolese and his nightmare (*Dec.* 9.7) demonstrate the immediate agency of the geographical and biological elements inherent in forest environments but only as they correspond to a direct perpetuation or conclusion to the narrative at hand. In longer tales like those of the two Roman lovers (*Dec.* 5.3) and Nastagio degli Onesti (5.8), the forest emerges as a crucible within which characters need only penetrate the forest for their story to elapse as an almost automatic result of the biological rhythms of wolves, brigands and supernatural phenomena that appear at precisely the right moment to continue the story. Upon meeting the resolution of their conflict, characters in these tales are always led out of the woods to continue their

³⁹⁹ The role of the narrator Dioneo is explained in terms of his exemption from being "costretto" by conforming to the theme of the day's storytelling: see *Dec.* 1.6.12.

⁴⁰⁰ One of the earliest metaliterary references to the *Decameron* is in the proem where the collection is likened to a gentle landscape abutting an imposing Dantesque mountain.

lives, suggesting to readers attuned to the work's metaliterary implications that Boccaccio depicts the element of setting only as an absolute narrative expedient within a larger system of literary generativity. There is no room in Boccaccio's perfection of the *novella*, communicated by an economy defined by brevity, for any authorial curiosity about the possibility for the individual elements of the novella, like setting, to exceed the boundaries of a carefully measured narrative.

Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, however, explodes the expectation that the forest is a mere narrative expedient. Throughout the poem, these heavily trafficked forest settings entangle its characters through the intersection of more complex and less linear trajectories. The first canto introduces its readers to the unbridled agency of the ubiquitous forest: the path along which Angelica flees leads her straight into one of her many pursuers (*OF* 1.10), Rinaldo, who then meets his enemy Ferrau (1.15). As these two decide to cooperate on their quest for Angelica and call a brief truce on their deep-seated racial and religious enmity, they entrust their locomotion to chance (*OF* 1.23), the quasi-divine force that guarantees they will only go in a circle. Throughout the poem, Fortuna and *caso* are repeatedly named the cause of the characters' redirections, as is detailed in the third chapter. *Caso* dictates that the moon reveal to the Saracen page Medoro the forest clearing where his wounded captain lay (*OF* 18.185) and *caso* too carries Angelica to the spot in the forest where Medoro is himself gravely injured (19.17). In the central episode, where the forest ecology and chance align with the very text of the poem itself, it is "per caso strano" that a disoriented horse leads Orlando through the forest to a meadow where he will discover the elopement of his beloved Angelica with Medoro (*OF* 23.100). None of these encounters displays the neat expedience of the *Decameron's* forest, which had always provided the immediate advancement of narrative

situations. Instead, the forest of the *Furioso* transcends mere expedience and demonstrates an almost artificial intelligence that embroils its passersby and their often less disoriented beasts within its own secret geography. The forest of the *Furioso* does not help to tell the story, as it does in the *Decameron* — it quite literally *is* the story, as the central episode narrating Orlando's breakdown perfectly illustrates.

One general contrast between the forests of the *Commedia* and the *Decameron* and the *Furioso* and the *Liberata* can thus be found in the authors' measure of resistance to their own adopted narrative order. To conclude this study by recasting its readings of metapoetic inventions as evidence of a broader trend in the first centuries of Italian literature, this dissertation thus offers the four poets' contrast in obedience a potentially useful distinction between the periods of literary history typically regarded as 'medieval' and 'Renaissance', categorizations that can only problematically describe the panorama of the relatively belated yet eerily modern Italian vernacular literature produced between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁰¹ Many of the most characteristic phenomena of the Italian Renaissance — the artistic interest in anatomy,⁴⁰² the cult around Lucretius's *De rerum natura*,⁴⁰³ the pragmatism of Niccolò Machiavelli's *Principe*⁴⁰⁴ — can be traced to a fundamental willingness to recognize the difference between what things should be and what things

⁴⁰¹ Factors contributing to the inadequacy of the term 'medieval' in Italian literary history involves the emergence of a vernacular literary language only in the 1230s — centuries after periods French and Provençal literary flourishing — coupled with the incipient modernity of early works like Dante's *Commedia* and Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, as well as the continuation of formal, linguistic and thematic conventions that bears little resemblance to the marked breaks and drastic evolutions characteristic of 'Renaissance' painting and architecture.

⁴⁰² On the rise of anatomical investigation by Italian artists see Bernard Schultz, *Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985).

⁴⁰³ For a history of the repopularization of Lucretius in fifteenth-century Italy see Brown, *The Return of Lucretius*. The fiercest advocate for the revolutionary aspect of the spread of Lucretianism is Stephen Greenblatt; see *The Swerve*.

⁴⁰⁴ On the role of contingency and practicality in Machiavelli's political thought see Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 15-62.

actually are, an impossible distinction in the catechistic worldview perpetuated by the first European universities.

In Italian literary history, the eventual resistance to prescribed epistemological structures can be seen in the increasing interest paid to poetic structures previously treated as inert. The earliest surviving chivalric poems tend to contain elements that immediately advance the story and its thematics, while it will take until the narratives of Ariosto, Tasso and Miguel de Cervantes for the elements of setting, character and trajectory, respectively, to be afforded some measure of rebellion against their prescribed functions.⁴⁰⁵ Boccaccio's forest does not fight against the narrative it is resolving, while Ariosto's forest refuses to be the straightforward expedient that it had been in earlier chivalric narratives. So too for Dante and Tasso: the *Commedia* presents a forest that introduces a metaliterary narrative, wherein the metaphysical hierarchy of base subject matter and divine form remains unquestionable, while the *Liberata* inscribes into a similar hierarchy the traces of death and victimhood that invite readers to question the very order being promoted.



Tasso's trees obey the Dantesque metaphysics order but not silently, just as Ariosto questions the expediency of Boccaccio's forests through an extreme exploitation of their potential — and it is in the misdirection of Ariosto's forests and the protests of Tasso's trees that the spirit of Renaissance resistance can be most clearly felt. Perhaps the neatest example of such a shift in literary practice and a fitting point to conclude this study is a figure strongly associated with both periods of literary history: Francesco Petrarca, the humanist who originated the

⁴⁰⁵ The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation describe the resistance to self-imposed narratological expectations in Ariosto and Tasso's writing, respectively. On the repeated deflations of the *Quixote's* own literary operations see William Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

concept of a ‘Dark Ages’.⁴⁰⁶ Like the four poets treated in this dissertation, Petrarca also features the forest as metaliterary symbol, here in order to emphasize the various thematic and formal enclosures defining — and confining — his poetic project.

In nearly every composition of the *Canzoniere*, the reader can sense the poet’s overarching obsession with closure, circularity and self-reflection. The opening sonnet traces the full circle in miniature, presenting in the first poem the speaker’s regretful guarantee that he will evolve only “in parte” (*RVF* 1.4) over the three hundred poems to follow. The most famous invention of the *Canzoniere*, spelled out in syllables in the fifth poem, is *l’aura*, the breeze, which in the norms of fourteenth-century Italian handwriting would have been indistinguishable from the name of his beloved Laura. The speaker is so enclosed by his own desire that, beyond forging a metaphorical association between his infatuation and his subjective perception of the landscape, this breeze quite literally calls out the name of his love object. As John Freccero has decisively argued, Petrarca’s act of literalizing the metaphor, making the breeze literally call out his beloved’s name, further suggests that the invention, which at first had merely recalled the sound of the word “lauro” (“laurel”, the leavess of which crown famous poets) in fact literalizes that association as well, by performing the very act of poetic virtuosity it suggests.⁴⁰⁷ To continue Freccero’s argument, it can be argued that Petrarca’s project triumphs not only through its having connected setting, character and literary ambition in its language but also through its condensation of the metaphoric connections between these elements to their most literal level: *laura* does not merely suggest the beloved because the infatuated speaker feels her presence but also because it literally pronounces her name, just as the redoubled significance of these

⁴⁰⁶ See Theodore Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages’”, *Speculum* 17.2 (1942): 226-242.

⁴⁰⁷ See John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics”, *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 34-40. See also Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch’s Laurels* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

homonyms not only represents the poetic worth implied by their etymology but it literally constitutes a worthy poetic operation. Lover, situation and poetic translation endlessly refer back to one another in the tightest and most dizzying of the *Canzoniere*'s circular inventions.

Like the love object of Petrarca's lyric project, the site of composition will also undergo a literalization. The *valle chiusa* where most poems in the collection situate the speaker—for example, in *RVF* 50.43, 116.9, 117.1 and 133.93— not only stands for the Vaucluse region of Provence that Petrarca found such a peaceful contrast to urban Italy but names it as well.⁴⁰⁸ But by bringing into the diegetic world the toponym of the author's actual adopted home, the text establishes a strict referentiality between the represented and the historical worlds, a link that closes off any interpretations that might deny the biographical realism that Petrarca has meticulously constructed within and around the *Canzoniere*. By linking the poet's biography and the speaker's lyric situation through the *valle chiusa*, then, the text forges its own hermeneutic enclosure, redoubling the circle of referentiality while also representing this circular enclosure within its own referential operation.

As the examples of *Laura* and the *valle chiusa* suggest, this circular poetics can become vertiginous, even to the speaker himself. In one of the most famous compositions in the collection, which opens "Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte" (*RVF* 129.1), the speaker describes his vain attempt to keep his infatuation with Laura from dominating his perception of the world around him where even every mountain landscape evokes Laura's likeness: "A ciascun passo nasce un penser novo / de la mia donna" (129.17-18). As with the inventions based on the names Laura and Vaucluse, readers can extend the speaker's

⁴⁰⁸ The authoritative biography of Petrarca is Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

exploration of the landscape depicted here towards the poet's potential metapoetic commentary and, again, such an extension returns the idea of poetic confinement, as the speaker seems to realize only here that the boundaries enclose him in the role of the statically unrequited lover. Given the extent to which the *Canzoniere* situates its lyrics in this characteristic landscape, the Provençal forest thus stands in for the thematic confines within which the project of the poetic collection flourishes. Just as he can never quit the particular forests, neither can he ever exit the situational enclosure of the lovelorn lover, the speaker of so much Provençal lyric. The forest landscape thus serves as the texture of the text itself, environmental representations of the thematic *locus amoenus* in which the protagonist feels himself trapped.⁴⁰⁹ Indeed, like Orlando a century and a half later, the protagonist seems to recognize himself within the formal confines of a poetic project.

A similar metaliterary extension can be made of the forest conjured in the envois of two *canzoni* in the central cluster also containing *Di pensier in pensier*. In the envoi of his most immortal canzone, which opens with “Chiare fresche e dolci acque” (*RVF* 126.1), he sighs with false modesty that the composition lacked the embellishment necessary to come out of the woods:

Se tu avessi ornamenti quant'ài voglia,
poresti arditamente
uscir del boscho, et gir in fra la gente (126.66-68).

This envoi echoes that of the canzone immediately preceding it:

O poverella mia, come se' rozza!
Credo che tel conoschi:
rimanti in questi boschi (*RVF* 125.79-81).

Readers primed by the characteristic inventions surrounding Laura and Vacluse to perceive links between a work's diegetic landscape and metaliterary commentary may imagine the

⁴⁰⁹ Such sentiment is evident in nearly all the macrotextual poems, such as the opening, closing and anniversary pieces.

woods as a more general extension for the book that contains them. This intuition can be substantiated by various approaches. Not only is the forest where many of the most characteristic lyrics concerning the lovelorn poet are situated but Petrarca's own poetic autobiography names the forest as the site where he has historically been the most prolific.⁴¹⁰

Beyond these congruent admissions from inside and outside the text of the *canzoniere*, another interpretation of the *boscho* can be advanced by considering materials with which Petrarca composed his poetry. Armando Petrucci has shown that *libri d'autore*, portable 'author's notebooks', were already in use by the early fourteenth century.⁴¹¹ These surely would have appealed to the modern man in Petrarca, who imagines himself carrying a slim and possibly self-transcribed copy of Augustine's *Confessiones* atop Mount Ventoux.⁴¹² The key to claiming the forest represents the link between poetry and the notebook in which the poetry was written may be the material itself: rag paper, ultimately composed of flax and hemp, had been in use alongside animal parchment in Italy since the twelfth century, though paper made from wood pulp does not emerge until 1844.⁴¹³

But it is more likely Petrarca would have been influenced by the many objects of literary communication that draw their names from trees. Indeed, the word that Latin writers would use most often to refer to a bound volume of writing, *liber*, original refers to the

⁴¹⁰ Petrarca's preference for the forest outpost over city life is stressed throughout the autobiographical *Secretum*: see Enrico Fenzi's edition *Secretum / Il mio segreto* (Milan: Murzia, 1992). The forest is remembered in the lyrics as well as a restorative space for the first-person poet: "Le città son nemiche, amici i boschi, / a' miei pensier" (*RVF* 237.25).

⁴¹¹ On *libri d'autore* see Armando Petrucci, "Minuta, autografo, libro d'autore", in Cesare Questa and Renato Raffaelli, ed., *Atti del convegno internazionale Il libro e il testo, Urbino 20-23 settembre 1982* (Urbino: Università degli studi di Urbino, 1984), 397-414, 412.

⁴¹² See Francesco Petrarca, *Familiarium rerum libri* 4.1 in the edition of Ugo Dotti, *Le Familiari* (Rome: Archivio Guido IZZI, 1991). For Petrarca's extraordinary sensitivity to the material aspects of books, such as size and binding quality, see Nicholas Mann, "Petrarca Philobiblon: The Author and His Books", in Simon Eliot, Andrew Nash and Ian Wilson, eds., *Literary Cultures and the Material Book* (London: British Library, 2007), 159-173, 163.

⁴¹³ On paper production in early modern Italy see Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, 30-44.

pliable layer of fibers exposed by “peeling” (“λέπω”, in Greek) off tree bark.⁴¹⁴ Even after the dawn of parchment and pulped cloth paper, products more dependent on the cultivation of livestock of plants rather than of plants alone, the rhetoric used to describe the format of professionally produced book still retains a nominal connection to trees: the individual “folios” (from *folium*, the Latin word meaning “leaf”) were rebound into a “codex” (from the Latin *caudex*, which originally referred to tree trunks).⁴¹⁵ If such a reading can be determined to cohere with the materials Petrarca used during the poetic process — or at least would have been able to assume were common knowledge to his readers — then the metonymic association between the forest and the literary project itself, as with Laura and Vacluse, again emerges as a literalization, as the forest that metaphorically represents the entire project can also refer to the very materials on which that project is composed. A forest that symbolizes the thematic constraints at the same time refers to the formal constraints of the book, recreating in the reader’s interpretive experience the speaker’s original dizzying fugue.

Reading the forest in this envoi as a reference to the confines of the canzoniere as a whole, both in theme and in material form, then recasts the entire program of envois as a metaliterary comment. If the forest is the canzoniere, then, how might this canzone be read as sung by the author of hundreds of individual poems confined to a singular poetic thematic? How might this metaliterary comment present the poet’s strict adherence to a particular poetics? Like the forests in the *Commedia* and the *Decameron*, the metaliterary forest here establishes a literary priority that readers are not explicitly invited to question: the canzoniere shelters the individual compositions, conceals their defects and provides an entire diegetic ecology from which most of the single compositions are derived. But like the *Furioso* and the

⁴¹⁴ See Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “liber”.

⁴¹⁵ See Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “caudex”.

Gerusalemme liberata, the envoi also gives the impression, albeit implicit, that the delimiting character of the collection can be a confining presence, rather than a defining one, one that threatened to keep a flawless composition such as *Chiare dolci fresche acque* from circulating on its own. Readers who take the envoi of such a fine canzone at face value are left with the sour impression of either the poet's extraordinary false modesty or his conformity to empty technical standards, either of which return the stereotype literary history has so easily constructed around "quello *stuffed shirt* di Petrarca".⁴¹⁶ But a richer, metaliterary reading of this envoi, one that better credits the poet of such a deliberately rigorous collection, instead imagines the speaker struggling against the thematic forest that traps him in a completely static lyric situation, in the much same way Madonna's breakout single from 1984, *Like a Virgin*, opens by wondering how it ever passed through the "wilderness" of sanitized, studio-produced pop music.⁴¹⁷ Petrarca and his forest thus seem to straddle the two periods of literary thought surrounding the full articulation of the Renaissance suspicion of literary norms, calling into the forefront the tensions around the stability of the lyric songbook as a closed and fixed literary form while simultaneously producing the most flawless embodiment of that very form, refining it further through his lifelong revisions.

Petrarca offers just one contemporaneous example of the metapoetic forest, the symbolic use of forests to stand for the artistic object containing that symbol, but others can be found, in other media, times and places. Stephen Campbell has argued for the identification of Cosmè Tura's *Allegorical Figure*, finished around 1460, as Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, in part based on the links between poetic material and the timber behind

⁴¹⁶ This witticism was delivered by Pier Massimo Forni in his spring 2010 seminar *Boccaccio II: The Decameron* at Johns Hopkins.

⁴¹⁷ Madonna, *Like a Virgin* A4.

the figure (**figure 7**), later painted over.⁴¹⁸ Scholars should see Dossi and Tasso meditating in their adopted home of Ferrara, a century apart, on the same potency of wooden material, with its long career in metaphysical didactics, as symbols for the act of artistic creation underway. When more than three centuries after Tasso's death the Belgian painter René Magritte sought to reveal the constructed nature and teleological impulse of his own artistic expression, his incisive symbolism also drew him to the forest, which in his 1926 painting *Le seuil de la forêt* (**figure 8**) he depicts as walls waiting to be carved out of the bark.⁴¹⁹ One may wonder whether Magritte had read and meditated on the order in the *Gerusalemme liberata* that Goffredo's troops "troncar le machine" (*GL* 3.74).

⁴¹⁸ See Stephen Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 38-39. The painting is held at the British Museum, No.3070. For the x-ray examination see Jill Dunkerton, Ashok Roy and Alistair Smith, "The Unmasking of Tura's 'Allegorical Figure': A Painting and Its Concealed Image", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 11:5-35.

⁴¹⁹ On this painting, in a private collection in Dusseldorf, see Jacques Meuris, *René Magritte: 1898-1967* (Cologne: Taschen, 1990), 20.



Figure 7: X-ray of Tura's *Allegorical Figure*



Figure 8: Magritte's *Seuil de la forêt*

Comparisons such as these may ultimately be just curiosities but the ability to make them in the first place is in fact the broadest objective of this dissertation. Alongside Petrarca's poetry, the *Commedia*, the *Decameron*, the *Orlando furioso* and the *Gerusalemme*

liberata are perhaps the five most celebrated works of early modern Italian literature and therefore the elaborations they make of the central metaphor of the forest for artistic material are the most able to stand up to the extended critical scrutiny of a dissertation. But beyond the readings concerning the particular vision of literary composition these masterpieces have been seen to espouse — and beyond the brief history of the metaliterary use of the forest that these readings together constitute — this dissertation has also sought to provide a case study in the metaliterary examination of setting.

Perhaps the most overlooked element of narrative, setting has been given little systematic attention by literary criticism and its metaliterary potential even less. The emergence of ecocriticism has attracted many readers to examine the diegetic worlds of Italian literary masterpieces but the majority of studies only offer close readings of particular geological, meteorological or biological references. What ecocritical studies have so far failed to address, either with respect to the Italian canon or generally, is the primary connection between environmental imagery and artistic self-commentary. If these poets imagined their works as forests, then what similarities inherent to the forest and the narrative poem or novella permitted these poets to make their comparisons in the first place? If all art is worldmaking, can any reliable correspondences be perceived between certain types of worlds and types of art, generally or at least in a given historical context? These broader and more subjective questions will help advance literary ecocriticism from a subgenre of trope history, occasionally called *tropics*, to a much more thorough perspective on literary production, an interpretive program that rehabilitates the cold technicality of formalism with the electrifying potential of actor-network theory.⁴²⁰ One of the most valuable promises

⁴²⁰ Bruno Latour's actor-network theory is theorized in his *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

posed by the first two generations of ecocriticism, beyond their contributions to the corpus of research on their particular works, is the preparation of a critical vocabulary that can inquire into the fundamental connection between the art of literary expression and environmental imagination.

This dissertation has aimed to provide one very limited response to the question of the correspondences between literature and imaginary, one confined to forests and the most elaborate narratives from the first three centuries of Italian vernacular poetry. Each of these four readings provides their own entryway into such an inquiry, asking of the countless questions that could be asked of literature the four most relevant to the authorial concerns of these centuries. Where should poetry find its subject matter? For Dante, it comes from the biographical, cultural and spiritual worlds around him that he translates into literary worlds, the rawest texture of which is the forests. How do stories work? Boccaccio offers several examples of stories that harness the randomness of their forest settings, all set in a macronarrative that generally advocates the opportune manipulation of circumstances. Who is in control? Despite his characters' and his readers' wishes, Ariosto's appears to direct his poem unilaterally but all the while reveals the active forces built into his constructed ecology. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, what is it all for? Tasso's forest follows the same trajectory of many other elements in the poem, the instrumentalization of a base material towards heroic, orthodox ends. Many of the considerations that preoccupied early modern Italian thinkers interested in the character, organization and function of literature can be subsumed into one or more of these four questions and, while this dissertation has been structured by author, its complex of readings and the connections between them can offer some general insight into the still mysterious connection between landscape and literature.

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Curriculum Vitae

- CONTACT** 3501 Saint Paul Street #1106 [+1] 646 280 8634
Baltimore, Maryland 21218 troy.tower@jhu.edu
United States
- BORN** Quincy, Massachusetts, United States, 7 January 1984
- EDUCATION** **Doctor of Philosophy**, Italian Literature, The Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, Maryland), September 2009 — May 2017
- Dissertation: “*Natura narrans*: Landscape as Literature in Early Modern Italy”, supervised by Walter Stephens, Pier Massimo Forni and Eugenio Refini
 - Qualifications: ‘Origins of Italian Literature’, ‘Humanism, Renaissance and Sixteenth Century’, ‘Modern Italian Literature, Neorealism and Beyond’
 - Awarded Singleton and Gilman Fellowships, 2009-2015
- Master of Arts**, Italian Studies, New York University (Florence, Italy/New York, New York), September 2007 — May 2009
- Thesis: “Towards a Critical Understanding of Laura Terracina’s *Discorsi sopra l’Orlando furioso*”, supervised by Jane Tylus and Virginia Cox
 - Exams given at the Università di Firenze: Enrico Ghidetti, *Letteratura e psicoanalisi. Il caso Svevo*, February 2008 (28/30)
- Bachelor of Arts**, Italian Literature, New York University (New York, New York), September 2002 — May 2006
- Honors thesis: “Spazi sospettosi nei *Cinque canti*”, supervised by Jane Tylus and Virginia Cox and awarded highest honors
 - Graduated *magna cum laude*
- LANGUAGES**
- Fluent in English and Italian
 - Reading and basic oral comprehension of Spanish
 - Reading knowledge of Latin, French and Old Provençal
 - Working ability in Ancient Greek, German and Russian
- TEACHING EXPERIENCE**
- Original Courses**
- | | | |
|-----|-------------|--|
| JHU | Spring 2016 | • 300.133 <i>Freshman Seminar: Women of Epic Fame in Literature and Drama, 800 BCE-1650 CE</i> |
| | Spring 2014 | • 214.341 <i>The Book of Nature, the Nature of Books: The Origins of Literary Ecology</i> (awarded through Dean’s Teaching Fellowship) |
| | Winter 2013 | • 211/214.306.30 <i>Medieval and Renaissance Italian Cities</i> (intensive, study abroad) |
| | Spring 2012 | • 214.301 <i>Survey of Italian Literature</i> (in Italian) |
| | Summer 2010 | • <i>Italian for Reading Knowledge</i> (intensive, graduate-level) |
| NYU | Spring 2009 | • <i>Speaking Freely</i> , Level 1, section B |
| | | • <i>Speaking Freely</i> , Level 3 (in Italian) |
| | Fall 2008 | • <i>Speaking Freely</i> , Level 1, sections B and C |
| | | • <i>Speaking Freely</i> , Level 3 (in Italian) |
- Curriculum-Based Courses (taught in Italian)**
- | | | |
|-----|-------------|---|
| JHU | Spring 2015 | • 210.152.2 <i>Italian Elements II</i> |
| | Fall 2014 | • 210.251.1 <i>Intermediate Italian I</i> |

- Spring 2013 • 210.252.2 *Intermediate Italian II*
 - Spring 2011 • 210.252.2 *Intermediate Italian II*
 - Winter 2011 • 210.151.13 *Italian Elements I* (intensive)
 - Fall 2010 • 210.151.2 *Italian Elements I*
 - Spring 2010 • 210.152.2 *Italian Elements II*
 - Fall 2009 • 210.151.5 *Italian Elements I*
- Guest Lectures**
- JHU Fall 2016 • 214.176 *Freshman Seminar: Warrior Women from Ancient Times to Game of Thrones* (1 class)
 - JHU Fall 2015 • 300.290 *Shakespeare and His 'Goddess': Real and Imaginary Lovers in the Poetry and Drama of Early Modern Europe* (1 class)
 - 214.376 *Warrior Women from Ancient Times to Game of Thrones* (1 class)
 - Spring 2015 • 100.235 *Politics, Society and Economics in the Renaissance* (1 class)
 - Winter 2015 • 100.264 *Re-reading the Crusades: Chronicling Holy War, 1096-1195* (1 class)
 - Fall 2014 • 300.290 *Shakespeare and His 'Goddess'* (1 class)
 - Spring 2014 • 214.301 *Survey of Italian Literature* (1 class, in Italian)
 - Fall 2013 • 300.111 *Shakespeare and His 'Goddess'* (2 classes)
 - Spring 2013 • 214.370 *Magic and Marvel of the Renaissance* (2 classes)
 - Spring 2011 • 214.382 *Dante and Aeneas in the Age of Google* (1 class)
 - 100.365.1 *Culture and Society in the High Middle Ages* (1 section)
 - Spring 2010 • 214.251 *Survey of Italian Literature* (3 classes, in Italian)
 - 010.712 *Michelangelo and His Contemporaries: License, Controversy and Reform in 16th-Century Italian Art* (1 class, in Italian)
 - NYU Summer 2008 • 59.9589 *End(s) of the Renaissance* (1 class)

PUBLICATIONS as Author

- “Anassilla: Stampa’s Poetic Ecology”, in Unn Falkeid and Aileen Astorga Feng, eds., *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry* (Ashgate, 2015), 185-197
- “Naming Trees in the *Gerusalemme liberata*”, *Romance Studies* 31.3-4 (November 2013): 139-151
- “Suspicious Spaces in Ariosto’s *Cinque canti*” (abstract), *Inquiry* 10 (2006): 18-19

as Editor

- Bernadette Wegenstein, “Not a Boob Job: Convergences of Medical, Cosmetic and Psychic Perspectives on Post-Mastectomy Breast Reconstruction”, ed. Troy Tower, in Alexander Edmonds and Samuel Taylor-Alexander, eds., *Cosmetic Futures: Ethics, Politics and Plastic Surgery*, special issue of *Medical Anthropology* (in preparation)
- Gaspara Stampa, *The Complete Poems: The 1554 Edition of the Rime, a Bilingual Edition*, tr. and intro. by Jane Tylus, eds. Jane Tylus and Troy Tower (University of Chicago, 2010)

as Translator

- Portions of Latin and Italian documents authored by, addressed to or concerning Vittoria Colonna (15th-17th centuries), in Ramie Targoff, *Divine Vittoria: A Renaissance Woman* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, forthcoming)
- Pietro del Riccio ‘Crinitus’ Baldi, from *Ad Faustum de Sylva Oricellaria* (1504), tr. Troy Tower, in Heather Stein, *Historical Writing and Community among the Orti Oricellari* (dissertation, JHU, 2015), 48-49
- Giorgio Grassi with baukuh, “Seven Questions, One Answer” (2013), tr. Troy Tower, *San Rocco* 8 (2014): 191-194
- Daniele Pisani, “A Collaboration: Paul Engelmann and Ludwig Wittgenstein” (2012), tr. Troy Tower, *San Rocco* 6 (2013): 121-131
- Daniello Bartoli, from *Dell’istoria della Compagnia di Giesù. L’Inghilterra* (1667), tr. Troy Tower, in Elizabeth Patton, “Dorothy Arundell’s ‘Acts of Father John Cornelius’: ‘We Should Hear from Her, Herself—She Who Left a Record of It in These Words’”, *ANQ* 24.1 (2011): 51-62; also in Elizabeth Patton, “From Community to Convent: The Collective Spiritual Life of Post-Reformation Englishwomen in Dorothy Arundell’s Biography of John Cornelius”, in Caroline Bowden and James Kelly, ed., *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Ashgate, 2013)

as Editorial Assistant

- Vittoria Colonna, *Amorous Sonnets*, tr. Ramie Targoff (University of Toronto, in preparation)
- Bernadette Wegenstein, *Philosophical Filmmakers: Jane Campion* (Bloomsbury, in preparation)
- Elizabeth Patton, “Women, Books, and the Lay Apostolate: A Catholic Literary Network in Late Sixteenth-Century London”, in Anne Coldiron, ed., *Booksapes* (forthcoming)
- Ramie Targoff, *Divine Vittoria: A Renaissance Woman* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, forthcoming)
- Elizabeth Patton, “Translation, Martyrology, and Gender: Four Contemporary Translations of Dorothy Arundell’s Lost English Narratives”, *Philological Quarterly* (forthcoming)
- William Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* (Bloomsbury, 2016)
- Bernadette Wegenstein, *The Cosmetic Gaze: Body Modification and the Construction of Beauty* (MIT, 2012)
- Walter Stephens, Zygmunt Barański, Theodore Cachey and Teresa Kennedy, eds., *Tra Amici: Essays in Honor of Giuseppe Mazzotta*, supplemental issue to *MLN* 127.1 (January 2012)
- Don Brophy, *Catherine of Siena: A Passionate Life* (BlueBridge, 2010)
- Jane Tylus, “Imitating Othello: The Handkerchief, alla Italiana”, in Albert Russell Ascoli and William West, eds., *Italy in the Drama of Europe* (Northwestern University, 2010), 237-260
- Jane Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others* (University of Chicago, 2009)

SELECTED

Invited Talks

PRESENTATIONS

- “Macaroni”, *Pastamania: A Night of Authentic Food and Culture*, Johns Hopkins University, 1 May 2014
- “On Commas”, *Performing Gaspara Stampa: An Evening of Poetry, Commentary and Song*, New York University, 15 February 2011

Conference Papers

- “Pierre Huyghe, Ecopoetry and ‘Art that Doesn’t Care about You’”, *VERSUS: Antagonism, Self-Criticism and Hostility and Literature and Art*, Johns Hopkins University, 16 September 2016
 - “*La grandissima selva della materia*: The Forest as Metaliterary Symbol in Early Modern Italy”, *61st Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 26 March 2015
 - “*Pronta materia ed atta*: The Forest and Tasso’s Instrumental Poetics”, *60th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, New York, 28 March 2014
 - “*Il mio sentier*: Metaliterary Ecologies in Ariosto’s Romance”, *59th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, San Diego, 6 April 2013
 - “Stampa by Numbers: Sequence as Intervention before and after Abdelkader Salza”, *Counterphilologies*, Johns Hopkins University, 21 September 2012
 - “*Un picciolo ruscello*: Gaspara Stampa’s Lyric Ecology”, *58th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, Washington, DC, 24 March 2012
 - “Naming and the Magic of Narrative in the *Gerusalemme liberata*”, *Naming, Re-Naming, Un-Naming in Early Modern and Enlightenment Culture*, Oxford University, 24 November 2011
 - “A Few Words on Michelangelo’s *Pietà* for Vittoria Colonna: An Emblematic Approach”, *57th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, Montreal, 24 March 2011
 - “Measured Words and Discursive Landscapes in the Boccaccian Narrative”, *Reading Medieval Landscapes: New England Medieval Studies Consortium Graduate Student Conference*, Brown University, 5 March 2011
 - “Unbelieving America: Geography and Authority in Ariosto and G.F. Pico”, *Sailing Away: Transatlantic and Transmediterranean Representations across Early Modern Worlds. Graduate Student Conference in Romance Studies*, Duke University, 11 September 2010
 - “Landscapes in Frames: Geography and Boccaccio’s Macrotxts”, 2010 International Boccaccio Conference, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1 May 2010
 - “Tapestry and Map: Calvino on Grammar in the *Furioso*”, *It’s Complicated: A Clash of Perspectives: 18th Annual Graduate Conference in Romance Studies*, Boston College, 20 March 2010. Accepted for publication in 2010 issue of *Romance Review* (now defunct)
 - “Twenty-Five Florins and a Rusty Sword: Normalizing *La Lena*”, *Performing Violence: Recreating the ‘Other’ across Space and Ages: 13th Annual Graduate Symposium in Romance Studies*, University of Minnesota — Twin Cities, 7 March 2009
 - “‘D’un cavallier divien la rima mia immortale’: Laura Terracina’s Ariostean Project”, *Graduate Student Symposium*, New York University in Florence, 22 April 2008
 - “Suspicious Spaces in Ariosto’s *Cinque canti*”, *Space, Place, and Imagination: Second Annual Graduate Student Conference*, University of Rhode Island, 29 March 2008
- Performances**
- “*SMARTASSES: Series Finale*”, *Emotionally Unavailable, but Like Not? Part II*, organized by Maya Martinez, The Crown, 29 July 2015

TRANSLATIONS Italian to English

COMMISSIONED• Mauro Giori, 2012. “Parlavo vivo a un popolo di morti’: *Comizi d’amore*, Cinéma vérité and Films with a Message” (9,501 words), tr. Matteo Cantarello and Troy

- Tower. Presented at *Speaking in/of Public: Sex, Sexuality and the Limits of Discourse*, Johns Hopkins University, 23 October 2014. Publication expected
- Teresa Perusini and Giuseppina Perusini, 1983. “The *Pressbrokat* Technique in Giovanni Martini’s Altarpiece at Remanzacco” (3,366 words). Portions to be included in Megan Berkey, “The Abduction of Helen and Her Companions: An In-depth Technical Study and Condition Assessment of the Artwork Focusing on the Artists’ Materials and Techniques”, in preparation at the Walters Art Museum
 - Marchetto Cara, 1504. “It’s No Time” (verse, 493 words). In program for *Secret of the Muses*, Byron Colby Barn, 2 March 2014
 - Stefano Boeri, 2013. “Panorama” (644 words). Forthcoming in *Panorama* (Baukuh)
 - Pietro Paolo Ridolfi, ed., 1698. “Note on the distinguished relics and the many others besides, and holy bodies that are in the Cathedral Church of S. Ciriaco in the city of Ancona” (660 words). Publication expected
 - Francesco Landini, late 14th cent. “The old flame” (verse, 58 words). In program for *La harpe de melodie*, Byron Colby Barn, 18 March 2012
 - Daniele Pisani, 2011. “*Hausgewordene Logick: Wittgenstein’s House*” (2,636 words). Forthcoming in *Log*
 - Howard Burns, 1984-1999. Three essays in *Renaissance Architecture and the Antique: Selected Essays by Howard Burns* (forthcoming): ““La necessità, che ha avuto d’imitare più gli antichi, che i moderni’: Innovation and the Antique in Borromini’s Architecture” (7,072 words); ““Restaurator delle ruyne antiche’: The Tradition and Study of the Antique in the Work of Francesco di Giorgio” (18,798); and “Raphael and ‘quell’antiqua architectura” (18,151)
 - Pier Massimo Forni, 1991. Introduction to the *Ninfale fiesolano* (4,885 words), tr. Tania Zampini and Troy Tower. Forthcoming in an anthology from University of Chicago
 - Francesca Baldry, 2005. ““Vivere collezionando’: Notes on Florentine Collectionism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” (9,366 words). Presented at *Italian Art at La Pietra: Transatlantic Conversations*, Villa La Pietra, 17 March 2008

Spanish to Italian

- Raúl Zurita, 2009. “I barcaioli della notte: #3” (verse, 235 words). Presented at *Boteros de la Noche: 7 Poems / 7 Languages / 7 Prints*, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, 1 May 2010

AFFILIATIONS

- translated.net, 2014 -
- Modern Language Association, 2013 —
- Institute for Infinitely Small Things, 2012 -
- baukuh, 2012 –
- Renaissance Society of America, 2010 —
- American Boccaccio Association, 2010 —

PROFESSIONAL Peer Review and Jury Participation SERVICE

- *Ecozon@*, 2015
- Zerilli-Marimò/City of Rome Prize for Italian Narrative, 2010

Conferences and Workshops Organized

- *VERSUS: Antagonism, Self-Criticism and Hostility in Literature and Art*, organized by Francesco Brenna, Alyssa Falcone, Danilo Frescaroli, Nina Tolksdorf, Troy Tower and Beatrice Variolo, Johns Hopkins University, 16-17 September 2016

- *Workshop on Writing and Publishing Book Reviews*, organized by Sara Castro-Klaren, Abigail RayAlexander and Troy Tower, Johns Hopkins University, 21 November 2015
- *The Many Forms of the Decameron: Interpretations, Translations and Adaptations*, organized by Lorenzo Bacchini, Francesco Brenna, Pervinca Rista, Troy Tower, Beatrice Variolo, Michele Zanobini, Alberto Zuliani et al., Johns Hopkins University, 24-25 April 2015
- *Counterphilologies*, organized by Abigail RayAlexander, Christopher Geekie, Marcus Heim, Bryan Klausmayer, Christopher Kozey, Troy Tower et al., Johns Hopkins University, 21-22 September 2012
- *Performing Gaspara Stampa: An Evening of Poetry, Commentary and Song*, Johns Hopkins University, 3 April 2011

Panels and Roundtables Organized

- “Practical Translation: Strategies for Verbally Collating and ‘Retranslating’ Multiple Witnesses for a Lost Source”, *62nd Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, Boston, 1 April 2016
- “Understanding the Emblematic Operation in 16th-Century Italy and Beyond”, *58th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, Washington, DC, 22 March 2012
- “Artificial Geography in the *Decameron*”, organized by Tania Zampini and Troy Tower, *2010 International Boccaccio Conference*, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1 May 2010

Panels Chaired

- “Exhibitions & Screenings”, *The Many Forms of the Decameron: Interpretations, Translations and Adaptations*, Johns Hopkins University, 25 April 2015
- “The Early Modern Imagetext”, *57th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America*, Montreal, 26 March 2011

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Elected Positions

- Co-Representative to the Graduate Representative Organization, German and Romance Languages & Literatures, Johns Hopkins University, 2015 — 2016
- Italian Section Representative, German and Romance Languages & Literatures Graduate Student Forum (*and similar bodies*), Johns Hopkins University, 2010 — 2015
- Environmental Concerns Chair, Graduate Representative Organization, Johns Hopkins University, 2013

Faculty Research Assistance

- Alexander Grass Humanities Institute, Johns Hopkins University, 2016 –
- Singleton Center Working Group on Practical Translation and Source Reconstruction, Johns Hopkins University, 2015 –
- Department of German and Romance Languages & Literatures, Johns Hopkins University, 2010 — 2014; 2016 –
- Support Services, Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, 2014 — 2015
- Collections & Academic Services, Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, 2013
- Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education, New York University, 2008 — 2009
- Department of Italian Studies, New York University, 2006 — 2009

Student Engagement

- Co-founder and academic advisor to the Johns Hopkins Italian Club, 2011 — 2015
- Reference for student applications, 2008 — 2013

Tutoring

- *Italian Conversation Hour*, JHU Italian Club, 2012, 2014 — 2015
- *Italian for Paleography Students* (graduate), Office of Academic Advisement, Johns Hopkins University, 2014
- *Italian* (all levels), Office of Academic Advisement, Johns Hopkins University, 2013 — 2014
- *Intermediate Italian II Oral Comprehension*, Johns Hopkins University (*volunteer*), 2013
- *Italian* (all levels), Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Italian Club, 2012 — 2013
- *Italian* (all levels), New York University (*volunteer*), 2004 — 2005; 2007 — 2008

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

- Dean's Teaching Fellowship, JHU, 2013. Course proposal: *Literature and the Environment: Premodern Connections* (retitled, *The Book of Nature, the Nature of Books: The Origins of Literary Ecology*)
- First alternate, Rome Prize in Renaissance and Early Modern Studies, American Academy of Rome, 2013
- Second place, graduate category, Betty and Edgar Sweren Student Book Collecting Contest, Johns Hopkins Libraries, 2011. Collection: "Pierre Huyghe: Captured in Media"
- Dean's Undergraduate Research Fund/Giuseppe Astorina Research Scholar, New York University, 2005

HONORS

- Nominee, Excellence in Teaching Award, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, 2011
- Honorable Mention for Best Talk in the Humanities, Undergraduate Research Conference, New York University, 2006. Title: *Suspicious Spaces in Ariosto's Cinque canti*
- Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò Award, New York University, 2006
- Founders' Day Award, New York University, 2006
- French Department Book Award, New York University, 2006

ONGOING RESEARCH

- *Georgic Poetry in Early Modern Italy*, a bilingual anthology of untranslated poems
- "Non vi si pensa", an article on Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna and emblematics
- *The Sitcom*, a reality TV series adapting Dante's *Commedia* to post-9/11 America