

An Introduction to *Orlando furioso*: A Chronological Index

The aim of this chart is to show the chronology of key incidents in the stories of the major and some minor characters of the poem by arranging them the form of a chart with specific canto and stanza citations. This short introduction to the chronological spreadsheet is intended to clarify, with some disclaimers, the method and reasoning behind the presentation and interpretations of the text represented.

To begin with, I have tried to discern the time span of the action in terms of years and, where possible, seasons or months, by laying out the events in each character's trajectory in sequence and then aligning them with those of the others in parallel columns. In this exercise, I believe I have shown that Ariosto was as careful about managing chronology as he was about geographical detail. Although very many specifics regarding duration – travel times, for example – are scarcely credible, the spans of time between simultaneous events appear, with few exceptions, to be carefully imagined and recorded.

Although nearly everything in the poem, including the siege of Paris, is fantastic fiction and replete with anachronisms, I have for convenience elected to present the actions as taking place in certain years and have tried to discern seasons within those years. The results are certainly debatable and somewhat fanciful, but not entirely arbitrary. Rather than using abstract designations such as Year One, Year Two, etc., I have assigned plausible historical years to the timelines. Charles I became king of all the Franks in 771 and Constantine V, who appears at the end of the poem, died in 775. Thus all the action must fall within those termini. Given that some of the earlier part of that period is covered in Boiardo's poem, our starting date must be later than 771. From the author's indications, it appears that Ariosto's narrative unfolds over about two-and-one-half years, beginning with Angelica's flight after the battle of Montaubon to the final duel between Ruggiero and Rodomonte. Taking into account the few explicit references to seasons or turning years, the scheme works best for me if we imagine that Canto I begins in the summer of 772 and Canto XLVI ends in the fall or winter of 774.

The divisions shown between seasons and, in some cases, months are mostly putative and hypothetical. In a few cases, the text is explicit, and I have referred to those details in the left-hand column. Because of the limitations of the Excel format, it was not possible to list incidents and keep spacing proportional. So the reader must regard spacing within the columns as elastic: the closeness of entries within columns is not necessarily relative to the passage of time. I have not attempted to reconcile mentions of short periods as "the next day" or "after three days," using the references to longer times elapsed between key events to determine the structure of the chart.

In order to arrive at a any chronological scheme it is necessary to examine and correlate all the bits of information, but principally, by my reckoning, nine major puzzle pieces, all but one of which can be more or less satisfactorily assembled. I describe them briefly and note their significance to the timetable:

(1) Rinaldo is dispatched to Britain probably in the middle of the first year, or 772, arrives in Scotland and involves himself with Ginevra's trouble before the fall. At this time, Ginevra's brother, Zerbino, is in Baiona, Galicia. By that fall, Rinaldo has gathered troops. Ruggiero observes the muster on his return from Alcina's island and on the way to Ebuda. It seems likely that Ruggiero's passage and the rescue of Angelica are still in 772 and Rinaldo's crossing to France in 773, after the two sides have wintered in place. This is a long time for Rinaldo to be absent, but I cannot see a way to reduce it.

(2) In connection with Orlando's adventures, the poet twice mentions fall and winter. After the first mention (at IX.7) the episode with Olimpia, inserted here in the 1532 edition, begins. At the end, the text is explicit that fall and winter have passed and it is now spring (XI.80-82). Then new adventures begin, including the rescue of Issabella from the brigands, which is explicitly a year after Zerbino's trip to Galicia. This is only possible if we accept that the Olimpia episode takes place within the fall and winter of 772-773 and that both references are to the same winter.

(3) Thus Issabella's story of having met Zerbino a year before her rescue and nine months after her capture by brigands aligns with other events.

(4) Likewise, Brandimarte can have disappeared from the camp seven or eight months before Fiordiligi mentions it.

(5) The poet tells us that it has been just over eight months have passed ("Fornito a punto era l'ottavo mese") between Bradamante's first and second encounters with Pinabello. The first meeting is in Canto II, not long after the battle of Montauban, or as I have placed it, in the summer of 772. The second in the following spring accords with the rest of the chronology.

(6) Orlando's madness lasts three months. The chart reconciles this period with the other timelines by positing these assumptions. The romance between Angelica and Medoro begins immediately after he is wounded by Zerbino's man, and they stay with the shepherd's family for more than a month. I place the beginning, after the Battle of Paris, in the spring of 773. At that time Orlando is traveling with Issabella, rescues Zerbino, travels some more, fights Mandricardo, then searches for him, finds the lovers' hideaway, and lodges with the same shepherd. It is not difficult to accept that Orlando's activities could take more than a month, so his arrival at the cottage after the lovers' departure does present a problem. Thus I place Orlando's madness, the midpoint of the poem, in the summer of 773 and the cure by Astolfo at Bizerte in the following fall.

(7) After the defeat of Marganorre, Marfisa promises to return to the city "before the trees have lost their leaves." If this adventure takes place in the fall, it is reasonable to interpret this ultimatum to mean before the next autumn, or "in less than a year."

(8) At least thirteen months elapse between Rodomonte's defeat at the bridge by Bradamante and his appearance after the wedding. If Bradamante confronts him in the late summer or early fall of 773, then the wedding and the final duel with Ruggiero can be placed in the fall of 774, well before the death of Constantine V.

That leaves one narrative strand that requires greater suspension of disbelief:

(9) Ricciardetto's romance with Fiordispina, said to have lasted some months ("durò il piacer per alcun mese"), is hard to reconcile with later events. We know from Boiardo that Bradamante's meeting and friendship with Fiordispina takes place very soon after Bradamante is wounded at the battle near Montauban (*OI* III.viii). According to Ariosto, she then spends one night at Marsilio's castle and returns to Montauban by the next evening and tells her story. Ricciardetto begins his escapade the same night, slips away and is received by Fiordispina the next morning. All of this, then, takes place before Bradamante's first appearance in Canto I. However, Ricciardetto is not discovered and condemned until Canto XXV, which must be the following year. In other words, compressing the events of the poem as much as is reasonable, we can say that the affair lasts from at least the summer of 772 to the spring of 773. So "alcun mese" would have to be at least seven months, more likely nine. That is admittedly stretching the time, but I cannot see how a shorter period can be reconciled with the other determinants noted above.

With these reservations and limitations, I hope that an analysis of the temporal dimension of the *Furioso* presented in this graphic form will be of interest to readers of the poem and of some help in keeping the multiple strands of narrative in mind with some degree of order.