

Luigi Pulci and Laurentian Florence:
“Contra hypocritas tantum, pater, dissi”

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Abstract

MICHAEL J. MAHER: Luigi Pulci and Laurentian Florence:
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(Under the direction of Dr. Ennio I. Rao)

Luigi Pulci was a fifteenth-century Florentine poet and frequenter of the illustrious Medici family. Pulci is well-known for his chivalric epic poem the *Morgante* and the label of heretic assigned to him by contemporaries and literary critics alike. The polemic that occurred between Pulci and Marsilio Ficino, one of the most respected intellectuals of the time, is the impetus for this study. This study examines Pulci's controversial writings within the unique historical context of Renaissance Florence. A specific focus is dedicated to Pulci's sonnets of religious parody and those written in derision of Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic philosophy. A representation of Ficino is examined in the devil-theologian Astarotte in Canto XXV of Pulci's *Morgante*, while a representation of Pulci himself is identified in the literary character of Malagigi, also found in the *Morgante*. Ultimately, it is the contest between Neoplatonic and popular-vernacular cultural programs that generated the Pulci-Ficino polemic, resulting in Pulci's undeserved reputation as a non-believer.

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Introduction

Luigi Pulci's complexion was as pale as one of Giotto's personages. His cheeks were pale yellow and his eyes tiny. He displayed the typical maladies of a Florentine afflicted by the plague. He seemed Lazarus: a walking corpse perished four days earlier.¹ Matteo Franco's macabre description of Luigi Pulci must be taken with a grain of salt because of the animosity between the two frequenters of Medici circles in Laurentian Florence.

The image of a drained individual is fitting for a poet embroiled in vicious polemics throughout his life. Pulci was constantly at odds with peers while they contended for the favor of Lorenzo de' Medici, the de facto ruler of Florence, and a privileged role in the Medicean culture of the 1470s. Polemics rooted in Pulci's provocative and slanderous sonnets consumed him as he eventually found himself on the losing end.

These polemics, financial misfortune, and an ever-changing cultural climate proved to be the external sources for Pulci's strife. He also struggled with an inability to control his vociferous ways. In *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* Alessio Decaria describes Pulci as one who "non tenesse a freno la lingua" (231).

Pulci is well known for his magnum opus, an epic poem entitled the *Morgante*. Notwithstanding contemporary controversy regarding Pulci's religiosity, his masterpiece gained immediate fame. The *Morgante* is valued today for its vivid use of Tuscan vernacular

¹ The opening lines are paraphrases of verses from Matteo Franco's sonnets found in Volpi, "Luigi Pulci. Studio Biografico" 29. Pulci was born prematurely in August of 1432 and had jaundice. If Franco's description of Pulci's complexion is accurate, this may be an explanation for the yellowish tint in his skin.

and its role in the evolution of the chivalric epic in Italy, preceding both Boiardo and Ariosto. Pulci's poetic style is characterized by a carefree, vivacious banter.

For Pulci, life and literature were two spheres that not only touched, but violently clashed, each having a drastic effect on the other. In *Letteratura fiorentina del Quattrocento*, Mario Martelli comments on Pulci's *Morgante*: "il mondo cavalleresco che il Pulci sceglie ad argomento del suo poema nient'altro è se non metafora della vita così come egli la vive" (207).

Pulci's polemics resulted in claims of impiety, plaguing him for much of his life as his numerous writings in self-defense fell on deaf ears. Pulci was treated as an enemy of the church after his death. Upon Pulci's passing in the Fall of 1484, he was buried in unholy ground in an unmarked grave outside of Padua's city walls.² Shortly thereafter, Girolamo Savonarola vilified Pulci from the pulpit, burning copies of the *Morgante* in Florence's piazze.

Filippino Lippi's 1485 frescoed depiction of Pulci in the Brancacci Chapel of Florence's Santa Maria del Carmine lends credence to Matteo Franco's morbid description of Luigi Pulci paraphrased in the opening. In Lippi's painting Pulci appears expressionless with sunken eyes and concave cheeks; he appears skeleton-like in comparison to others in the scene.

Pulci's posture in the fresco depicting Saint Peter's raising of Theophilus is intriguing. While the other subjects have their hands faithfully folded, Pulci's arms are extended, slightly bent at the elbows, one palm facing the sky and the other toward the ground. Lippi's depiction of Pulci suggests an undecided individual in front of a Biblical

² See Volpi, "Luigi Pulci. Studio Biografico" 28.

miracle. Lippi's fresco further evidences the perception of Pulci's religious skepticism shortly after his death.

The present study addresses uncertainties surrounding Pulci's tumultuous life, primarily his polemics and his resulting reputation as a heretic. Pulci's primary nemesis was one of the most respected intellectuals of his day, Marsilio Ficino. The fame enjoyed by Pulci's adversary led to the diffusion of his claim to Pulci's impiety. The impious label has been applied to the whole of Pulci criticism, including the treatment of his *Morgante*. In reevaluating the motives behind the polemics one may shed light on the label of heretic assigned to Pulci by his enemies.

This study will examine Pulci's polemics in three phases. The first chapter contextualizes Pulci within 1470s Florence. This is achieved through a biographical survey of the poet in order to better comprehend his life and times. The account of Pulci's early life is followed by an introduction of the *Morgante*'s chronology, style, and content. This chapter concludes with a survey of Pulci criticism from the late fifteenth century to the most recent publications.

The second chapter of this study examines the sonnets and letters in which Pulci attacks religious hypocrites, and Medici frequenters Matteo Franco and Marsilio Ficino. In *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera* Alessandro Polcri addresses Pulci's controversial sonnets and their treatment by his adversaries: "I sonetti insomma divennero il vero *casus belli* gonfiato appositamente e con successo se il fraintendimento che ne derivò ha poi continuato a sussistere nel tempo e ha attraversato tutta la critica pulciana più o meno concorde, tranne alcune eccezioni, nel riconoscere la non religiosità di Pulci" (46).

Chapter two oscillates between a *lectura* of Pulci's controversial sonnets and their contextualization through relevant contemporary and critical texts. Examining these sonnets and letters closely will clarify the specific writings deemed sacrilegious as well as shed light on their chronology. This chapter illuminates Pulci's underlying motivation in composing texts that had such a negative effect on his reception both during his life and after his death.

The third chapter examines a representation of the Pulci-Ficino polemic found in the literary character Astarotte from Canto XXV of the *Morgante*. The devil-theologian's discourse closely resembles Marsilio Ficino's philosophy from his *De Christiana religione*. This literary representation of Ficino's voice in the *Morgante* grows increasingly intriguing when a representation of Pulci appears in the benevolent wizard Malagigi. A comparison of Astarotte and Malagigi, and a close examination of their interaction will further develop themes uncovered in chapter two.

The conclusion to this study will explore Pulci's own commentary on the polemics found within his repentant *Confessione*. A more precise estimation of Pulci's polemics and the theological discourse presented in the *Morgante* will shed light on a misunderstood poet and serve as a window into a unique historical time frame: the cultural turning point that the 1470s were in Renaissance Florence. By using these different literary mediums from three different periods in Pulci's life this study hopes to gain a better understanding of the polemics, their effects on Pulci's reputation, and, ultimately, the vexing question regarding Pulci's religious orientation.

Chapter I

Luigi Pulci: Life, Times, and the *Morgante*

1.1 Early Life and Family

Luigi Pulci was born prematurely on August 15, 1432 to Jacopo di Francesco Pulci and Brigida de' Bardi.³ The family was noble, possibly of French origins, sharing the same coat of arms as Ugo di Toscana. The Pulci family resided in the neighborhood of San Piero Scherfaggio of Florence. They owned land with a large villa in the area of San Giuliano in Settimo just on the outskirts of Florence, still known to this day as Castelpulci.⁴ They counted themselves amongst the most storied families of Florence's mobility.

The Pulci family's origins were Guelph; the family name appears prominently in the records of public affairs. In addition to Luigi, the most noteworthy of the Pulci name were Ponzardo and Adoardo. Ponzardo was involved in both military and diplomatic affairs in the early fourteenth century, participating as one of the *feditori* in the battles at Montecatini and Altopascio in 1315 and 1325. Adoardo was an active participant in the political factions, enduring multiple banishments from the Florentine republic.

³ Volpi's "Luigi Pulci. Studio biografico" along with Pellegrini's intro. to *Luigi Pulci, l'uomo e l'artista* are considered the authoritative biographical texts on Luigi Pulci. For this reason, they are indispensable and essential to the opening pages of this study. I am also grateful for the relevant biographical contributions provided by the following texts: Carnesecchi, "Per la biografia di Luigi Pulci"; Davie, *Half-serious Rhymes* 13-31; Dego, Intro. *Morgante* 7-65; De Robertis, Intro. *Morgante e Lettere* xi-lxv; Jordan, *Pulci's Morgante. Poetry and History in Fifteenth-Century Florence* 17-42.

⁴ For more on this property's history see Ruschi, *La Villa di Castel Pulci*.

Luigi's father Jacopo was born in 1382. Jacopo was active in Florentine public life, holding the offices of *podestà*, military commander, and *camarlingo del comune*. In October of 1426 Jacopo was elected to the Council of Ten.⁵ Three years earlier, Jacopo had married Brigida di Bernardo de' Bardi; they had nine children. Eventually Jacopo was considered *posto a specchio*, meaning his name was found on a list of debtors prohibited from holding public office and participating in other public affairs. However, records show that towards the end of Jacopo's life he made an attempt to buy back the family's previously alienated ancestral properties.⁶

Jacopo's financial troubles were the culmination of at least a century of perpetual financial decline in the Pulci family. In the authoritative biographical study "Luigi Pulci. Studio Biografico" Guglielmo Volpi suggests the reason for the family's decline: "la famiglia cresceva a dismisura, e forse l'antica agiatezza e le nobili parentele avevan fatto contrarre a lui e alla sua donna abitudini signorili, che difficilmente e non così presto si abbandonano col volge sorte" (4).

Documents from the land register reveal that by August of 1451 Jacopo was deceased along with four of his nine children. He was survived by his wife Brigida; three sons Luca, Luigi, and Bernardo; and two daughters Lisa and Costanza. The family's once abundant patrimony had been reduced to a mill with five plots of land in the Mugello and another house with a modest garden and vineyard in

⁵ Florence's Council of Ten or the *Dieci di Balia* was a council who served a term of six months or a year. They shared diplomatic power with the *Signoria* during wartime or other instances of crisis or peril.

⁶ In "Luigi Pulci" Volpi includes the following document from Jacopo's pen: "E comprai da' frati Sancta Crocie et da' romiti degli Agnioli et da' frati de' Servi una casa da signore posta nel castello de' Pulci, la quale tengo per mia abitazione con terre vigniate ecc... E più ò comprato da Mona Mea, donna fu di Piero Rinuccini, staiora 60 di pastura ecc..." (4n4).

Pieve a Settimo. In August of 1451 twenty-year-old Luigi and nineteen-year-old Luca declared their arduous financial situation to the land registry:

Non abbiamo caxa in Firenze; tengnianne una a pigione da Giovanni di Iacopo Naxi; paghianne f. XII. danari di monte né paghe sostenute non abiamo, che si xono venduti di mano in mano. Non facciamo arte né mestiere nessuno né stiáno a nulla, perché siáno stati in chontumacie col chomune et anchora abiáno debito con esso, che ci ghuardiàno, et anchora abiáno debito con ispeziali perxone che n'abiáno adosso la sentenza: siáno a specchio per circha a f. L. et stati circha a anni VI.⁷

Further augmenting the Pulci brothers' debt was nineteen-year-old Lisa's marriage to Mariotto d'Arrigo Davanzati in 1452.⁸ Shortly after Lisa's marriage, Costanza, Luigi's other sister, married Tedice di Lodovico Villani. Fewer mouths to feed should have alleviated the family's financial stress; however, the family had scarce resources to provide dowries for the young brides. Just two years after Jacopo's death, Lisa and Costanza's marriages lengthened the Pulci brothers' inherited list of creditors. During this period, and at other difficult times in his life, Luigi often took refuge in the family's mill in Mugello, one of the few sources of income for the family.

Luca was the first to take action in an attempt to ameliorate the family's financial situation. By 1458 he had departed Florence and was trying his hand at various banking ventures in Rome; he was failing and increasing the family's already insurmountable debt. By 1460 Luca was in Calimala along with brother Bernardo as they both continued their ill-fated business endeavors.

⁷ Qtd. fr. Volpi, "Luigi Pulci. Studio biografico" 5.

⁸ Similar to Luigi, Mariotto d'Arrigo Davanzati was also a vernacular poet and an active participant in Florentine politics and civic life. For more information on Mariotto d'Arrigo Davanzati see "Davanzati, Mariotto" *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*.

1.2 Castellani and Medici Patronage

While Luca and Bernardo were deepening the family's debt, Luigi found a position at the service of Francesco di Matteo Castellani, an active cultural figure in Medicean Florence.⁹ In the 1896 biographical study "Per la biografia di Luigi Pulci" Carlo Carnesecchi describes Pulci's role while at the service of Castellani: "compagno e commensale, scrivano e ragioniere, uomo di fiducia in tutto e per tutto di messer Francesco" (375). The Pulci and Castellani families were similar in terms of their respective histories, and Luigi and Francesco enjoyed a personal friendship.¹⁰

Pulci took full advantage of the copious Castellani library. A document from January 2, 1459 by Castellani's pen describes certain texts lent to Pulci:

Virgilio, volume anticho in charta di chapretto, scripto di lettera moderna, *Bucholicha Georgica* e l'*Eneide*, con uno quinterno novo spichato dinanzi, in parte scripto della vita di Virgilio, e coperto di coio rosso novo stampato. El quale libro mi chiese per andare a udire da messer Bartolomeo da Colle, torna in casa di Pierfrancesco de' Medici; e debbemelo restituire salvo.¹¹

This document provides insight into Pulci's literary formation, a period that lacks documentation.¹² The words "scripto di lettera moderna" allude to Luigi's poor preparation in classical languages and his need for a text written in Italian. Pulci had a rudimentary

⁹ In *Una famiglia e le sue ricordanze*, Giovanni Ciappelli, the leading authority on the Castellani family, describes Francesco di Matteo Castellani: "uomo sufficientemente colto e ricco, e tuttavia non mercante, che prima per nemesi non famigliare, e in seguito anche per scelta, rimarrà ai margini della vita politica, preferendo occuparsi del mantenimento di un patrimonio e di un'identità familiare continuamente minacciati dalle sanzioni politiche e finanziarie messe in atto dal regime contro i fiorentini a lui simili" (3).

¹⁰ For a full-length study dedicated to the relationship of Luigi Pulci and Castellani see Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani*.

¹¹ Qtd. fr. Carnesecchi 378.

¹² In another interesting document by Castellani's pen dated May 21, 1460, Castellani describes a *Dottrinale* lent to Pulci: "volume di un quarto foglio in papiro, coperto di coio bianco vecchio: chiesemelo per studiare l'arte metrica" (qtd. fr. Carnesecchi 378). The *Dottrinale*, a text on poetic meter, may be seen as facilitating Pulci's future best seller, the *Morgante*, written in ottava rima.

knowledge of Latin and knew very little, if any, Greek. He was ill-equipped to partake in the humanist circles established by Cosimo il Vecchio. Pulci's inadequate preparation for humanist discussion undoubtedly played a role in the eventual clash with Marsilio Ficino, proponent of a culture foreign to Pulci.

Of the utmost importance is Castellani's record of the occasion for Pulci to enter the Medici house. Pulci borrowed the works authored by Virgil in preparation to attend lectures offered in the Medici palace by Bartolomeo da Colle. This is none other than Bartolomeo Scala, son of a miller from Colle Val d'Elsa, one of the first victims of Pulci's vituperative verse and eventual Chancellor of Florence.

Upon entrance in the Medici household, Pulci quickly fell into the favor of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, daughter-in-law of Cosimo and mother to Lorenzo. Lucrezia was a poet of religious texts in the vernacular as well as a prominent figure in Medici affairs.¹³ It is unclear what the religiously devout Lucrezia found appealing about the jocular and often mischievous Pulci. Perhaps Lucrezia and her ten-year-old son Lorenzo enjoyed the respite that Pulci provided from the austere humanism fomented by Cosimo il Vecchio.

Luigi's devotion to Lucrezia was rewarded in 1461 when she commissioned him to write an epic poem dedicated to the illustrious figure of Charlemagne.¹⁴ The poem was given the title *Morgante* not by Pulci, but by the public who adored the leading protagonist. Mark Davie, author of *Pulci's Half-serious Rhymes*, proposes a theory of political motivation behind Lucrezia's commissioning of the poem:

¹³For more on Lucrezia Tornabuoni's poetry see Pezzarossa, *I poemetti sacri di Lucrezia Tornabuoni*. For a recent English translation of her poetry and an invaluable introductory essay see Tylus, *Sacred Narratives*.

¹⁴Lucrezia's commission is further observed as unique because of the relative unpopularity of chivalric texts in Florence at the time. For more on the popularity of chivalric texts in Medicean Florence see Villoresi, *La letteratura cavalleresca* 97.

It seems likely that Lucrezia's commission was part of a diplomatic initiative taken by Medicean Florence in 1461 to establish friendly relations with the newly crowned French King Louis XI, and that the celebration of Charlemagne—as the ancestor of the French monarchy, and mythical refounder of Florence after its destruction by the Goths—was considered a suitable theme by which to cement the alliance. (14)

Under Lucrezia Tornabuoni's patronage Pulci entertained the young Lorenzo. This was undoubtedly the most pleasant time in Pulci's life. As the young Lorenzo matured, Pulci assumed a primary role in Lorenzo's carefree *brigata*.

This period may easily be viewed as the calm before the storm unleashed by Pulci's polemics with Franco and Ficino. During the polemics Pulci's previously elevated, privileged role in the Medici circle gave him a certain sense of security while he attacked others through his poetry. It was in this uniquely Medicean atmosphere, through emotional highs and lows that Pulci's epic poem, the *Morgante*, took form. Pulci's masterpiece achieved immediate widespread popularity throughout Italy and criticism from his opponents in Florence.

1.3.1 *Morgante*: Chronology of Composition

In its entirety the *Morgante* is an epic poem comprised of 28 cantos, divided into two distinct segments: the first 23 cantos are called the *Morgante minore*, and the last five cantos are referred to as *La rotta di Roncisvalle*. The entire 28-canto version is referred to as the *Morgante maggiore* or simply the *Morgante*.¹⁵

There are some general chronological divisions that may be assigned with certainty to the composition of the *Morgante*.¹⁶ Between 1461 and 1468 Cantos I-XVIII were written; these cantos include the famous Margutte episodes. By 1472 the poem was

¹⁵ Similar distinctions will be used consistently throughout this study.

¹⁶ For a chronological outline of the *Morgante*'s composition see Davie, *Half-serious Rhymes* 19-21. Davie also provides a bibliography of chronological studies of the poem (29n19).

completed through Canto XIX. There is then a span of six years that lacks relevant documentation. By 1478 he completed the poem through Canto XXIII, signaling the completion of the *Morgante minore*. There are two early editions of the 23-canto version: one before November of 1478 and the other by the Ripoli printing press in 1481.¹⁷

The *Morgante* was first published in the final 28-canto version in early 1483. The years from 1479 to 1483 are the time frame in which *La rotta di Roncisvalle*, the last five cantos of the poem, is believed to have been completed. There are only two chronological certainties that may be applied to this period of four years. The “bestiary” passage of Canto XXV was worked on after 1479 as it draws from a source completed in that year.¹⁸ The final canto was written or modified after Lucrezia Tornabuoni’s death in 1482.

In summary, the two aforementioned segments, the *Morgante minore* (Cantos I-XXIII) and *La rotta* (Cantos XXIV-XXVIII), can be viewed as largely composed in two distinct timeframes. The *Morgante minore* was composed in the 1460s and 1470s, and *La rotta* between 1479 and 1483. However, there are certain episodes in *La rotta* which seem to have been anticipated, and possibly completed, during the composition of the *Morgante minore*. This leads to a general air of chronological uncertainty.

1.3.2 *Morgante*: Style

Pulci and his epic poem are known for linguistic innovation. Pulci’s mastery of Tuscan vernacular was without equal. He utilizes a witty and jocose Tuscan vernacular that is extraordinary and at times difficult to read, even for his most learned peers. In Giuliano

¹⁷ The date for the first edition is derived from a request by Ercole d’Este for a copy of the *Morgante*, qtd. in section 1.8 of this study.

¹⁸ See Davie, *Half-serious Rhymes* 20.

Dego's introduction to one of the more recent editions of the *Morgante* he highlights a particularly verbose octave:

La casa cosa pareva bretta e brutta,
vinta dal vento, e la natta e la notte
stilla le stelle, ch'a tetto era tutta;
del pane appena ne dètte ta' dotte;
pere avea pure e qualche fratta frutta,
e svina e svena di botto una botte;
poscia per pesci lasche prese all'esca;
ma il letto allotta alla frasca fu fresca.¹⁹ (23.47)

Pulci's poetic style in the *Morgante* is that of a misplaced *cantastorie*. Instead of performing for rowdy crowds in the streets of Florence, Pulci's public was the frequenters of the Medici palace on Via Larga. Instead of singing chivalric verse, he put his musical poetry to paper while immersed in a uniquely Medicean atmosphere. Reflections of this atmosphere are readily available and easily detected through allegorical representations in the final five cantos of the *Morgante*.

Pulci's linguistic acrobatics and sometimes incendiary verse were a much enjoyed form of entertainment. The *Morgante* was enjoyed by all, from illiterate Florentine plebeians listening to Pulci's verses sung by *cantastorie* in Florence's piazze, to heads of state reading manuscripts beyond *le mura*. Pulci's verse had something to offer everyone: from realistic battle scenes to elevated theological discourse.

1.3.3 *Morgante*: Content

The *Morgante* is an epic poem whose main characters are the familiar cast from the Carolingian cycle of chivalric literature. The narrative follows Orlando and his fellow knights on various adventures in the name of chivalry, Christianity, and Charlemagne in spite

¹⁹ For the identification of this octave by Dego see *Morgante* 26-27. To maintain consistency this octave and future quotations from the *Morgante* are qtd. fr. Greco, *Morgante e opere minori*.

of Gano's treacherous betrayals.²⁰ The themes of Christian paladins battling unworthy Saracens, and the Christianization of Hercules embodied in the protagonist Morgante certainly appealed to Lucrezia's orthodoxy. However, Pulci presents Charlemagne, the protagonist, as largely inept and foolish until the poem's final cantos.²¹

The *Morgante minore*'s plot is thought by some to be derived from an anonymous *Orlando* believed to have been written in 1384.²² *La rotta* utilizes the fourteenth-century *Spagna in prosa* and the *Spagna in rima* as its narrative base. The *Morgante* is by definition a *rifacimento* in certain instances; however, this term may be too reductive if applied to the text as a whole. If in some instances Pulci rewrote already existent sources, he did so with an increased linguistic complexity. Pulci rewrites sources from a well-defined chivalric tradition through a realistic, comic lens, reminiscent of Burchiello's parodic texts from the first half of the fifteenth century.

Pulci's modifications and additions to already existent sources are illuminating. Most notable are the novel characters Morgante, Margutte, and Astarotte. In *La letteratura cavalleresca* Marco Villoresi terms these new additions to the chivalric tradition "i portavoce dell'arte pulciana" (122).

Morgante is a giant who at the beginning of the poem converts to Christianity and accompanies Orlando as his trusty squire. Wearing old, rusty armor Morgante makes quick work of Saracens with his bell clapper. Morgante is a grotesque caricature, both physically

²⁰ For plot summaries of the *Morgante* see Villoresi, *La letteratura cavalleresca* 116-18; Bruscagli, *Il Quattrocento e il Cinquecento* 39-40.

²¹ Francesco De Sanctis describes Pulci's Charlemagne as "un rimbambito" (*Storia della letteratura* 370). Although the influence from the Carolingian cycle of literature is the most prominent and easily identifiable in the *Morgante*, there are Arthurian traces that have yet to be identified and explored by Pulci critics. The degradation of the character of Charlemagne presented by Pulci bears a striking similarity to the degradation of the figure of King Arthur from the Arthurian cycle.

²² See section 1.8.

and morally, of a Carolingian paladin. The Morgante character embodies the parody that permeates much of Pulci's poetry.

Margutte is the most mischievous of all characters; he is a demi-giant who demonstrates little self-control. He has an insatiable appetite and a penchant for gambling and cheating. He is most famous for his profane credo in which he declares to believe only in gluttony, gambling, and other physical pleasures (18.115-142). Marco Villoresi describes Margutte: "gigante mancato, maestro di imbroglio e ruberie che in una spassosa e irriverente dichiarazione professa il suo 'credo', fondato sui piaceri della gola e del gioco" (*Letteratura cavalleresca* 117).

The third novel character created by Pulci, particularly significant for the third chapter of this study, is the devil-theologian Astarotte. The benevolent wizard Malagigi summons Astarotte to enter Rinaldo's horse and carry him from Egypt to Roncisvalle for the final battle. Leading up to and during the voyage, Astarotte lectures and entertains questions on contemporary theological topics. Literary critics seem to be in disagreement regarding Astarotte's function in the poem. Some view Astarotte's discourse as Pulci's critique of contemporary religious practices; others view the episode as Pulci's own religious voice and proof of his deviant religiosity.²³ This study leans toward the former and situates the episode specifically within the context of the Ficino-Pulci polemic.

1.4 Luigi Pulci and Medici Culture

Judging from Pulci's writings and other relevant documents he appears as one who cherished being the center of attention. Bernardo Tasso sustains that Pulci sang cantos of the

²³ For a review of critical treatment of the Astarotte character, see Lèbano, *Morgante* 912-17.

Morgante at the Medici table as they were completed.²⁴ Pulci became a mainstay in the Medici house as an active participant in a culturally rich atmosphere that included the most well-known artistic, philosophical, and political figures of the Italian Renaissance.²⁵

Pulci's influence on Lorenzo's literary production is evident in Lorenzo's early works. Lorenzo's *Caccia col falcone* is one such example; the poem describes a typical day of falconry by Lorenzo and his closest friends, or his *brigata*. Pulci's role in Lorenzo's *brigata* is evidenced by lines from the poem:

Luigi Pulci anco rimaso fia:
e' se n'andò là oggi in un boschetto,
ch'aveva il capo pien di fantasia:
vorrà fantasticar qualche sonetto;²⁶ (40.1-4)

Pulci undoubtedly had an influence on Lorenzo's *Nencia da Barberino*, one of Lorenzo's most polished literary pieces. The poem is a pastoral that follows the amorous thoughts of the shepherd Vallera for his lovely Nencia. The *Nencia* gave way to an entire cycle of idyllic, pastoral *Nenciali* texts, including Pulci's contribution to the tradition entitled the *Beca da Dicomano*. Many *Nenciali* works are believed to be the product of collaboration between multiple authors. Regardless of the authorship of these works, Pulci was undoubtedly one of the foremost proponents and influences of popular literature in the vernacular during the *brigata*'s heyday.

The Medici women liked Luigi a great deal as evinced by Lucrezia commissioning him to write the *Morgante*. Lorenzo's wife Clarice, known for her dislike of Poliziano, was

²⁴ Bernardo Tasso's letter is the following: "E che sia vera questa mia opinione, vedete che, volendo il Magnifico Lorenzo de' Medici; nel tempo del quale cominciarono a fiorir le buone lettere; per li molti eruditi, giudizioli, e pellegrini ingegni che beneficati dalla sua liberalità gli stavano a canto, introdurre in questa nostra lingua, come capace d'ogni vaghezza poetica, tutte quelle maniere di Poesia che usavano gli antichi, introdusse anco questa: e Luigi Pulci tutti i canti della sua Opera cantò alla tavola sua" (Seghezzi 325).

²⁵ For the most notable figures of Medicean Florence, see Pellegrini, *Luigi Pulci, l'uomo e l'artista* 24-26.

²⁶ The lines from Lorenzo de' Medici's *Caccia col falcone* are qtd. fr. Orvieto, *Tutte le opere* 2: 669-70.

quite fond of Pulci.²⁷ In 1472 Pulci accompanied Clarice on a trip to Rome. Pulci also appears in a private letter from Nannina de' Medici to her mother Lucrezia. Pulci's name in the private, unpublished letters of the Medici women evidences Pulci's presence in the Medici affairs. This letter is especially interesting as the post script to the letter addresses Luigi's religious devotion: "Luigi de' Pulci molto divotamente insieme con gli altri questa mattina s'è comunicato, e farà buona riuscita."²⁸ Nannina's letter reinforces the view that Pulci's religious devotion was subject for private discussion.

Pulci also played a diplomatic role in Medicean politics; he carried out diplomatic missions from Naples to Milan. Pulci had few possessions in Florence and was constantly pursued by debt collectors while in the city. His early diplomatic missions outside of Florence's walls were possibly a favor to Pulci from Lorenzo. These missions, not always of a pressing nature, were in locations convenient to Pulci's personal business affairs.²⁹

Once he entered the service of Roberto Sanseverino, Pulci's diplomatic role in Lorenzo's affairs grew increasingly important.³⁰ Galeazzo Maria Sforza's assassination

²⁷ The trip with Clarice, although a testament to his popularity with Lorenzo's wife, is viewed by critics as an insignificant mission. Pulci's *burchiellesco* brand of literature, found throughout the *Morgante*, is evident in a less than flattering description of the daughter of Teodoro il Paleologo encountered by Luigi and Clarice during their trip to Rome: "Due naccheroni turcheschi nel petto; un mentozzo, un visozzo compariscente, un paio di gote di scrofa; il collo tralle nacchere. Due occhi che sono per 4, con tanta ciccia intorno et grasso e llardo et sugna, che 'l Po non ha sì grande argini. Et non pensassi che le gambe fussino però di Giulio secco, con un paio di mantaconi attaccate a quelle, di staiora tre in circa a seme; ch'è, da primo et secondo, culo, et orrevole, 1/3 e 1/4, gambe over carratelli; et più altri ver' i confini. Chiasso in mezzo; sugna per tutto. Io non so s'io mi vidi mai carnesciale o cosa tanto unta et grassa et morvida et soffice et da ridere quanto questa befanìa strana" (De Robertis, *Morgante* 980).

²⁸ Qtd. fr. Commanducci 235-36.

²⁹ This is evidenced by a letter written to Lorenzo from Foligno, one of the few places Pulci found financial success: "Ma pure s'io non ti scrivessi tu non sapresti ove io sia, volendo qualche cosa commettermi: e ancora se altri ti domandassi di me: che fa Luigi? o dove è? sarebbe comune vergogna se tu non sapessi rispondere presto: a Fuligno, et mercatante in grosso" (De Robertis, *Morgante* 960-63).

³⁰ Alessandro Polcri reassess Pulci's role as a diplomat serving Lorenzo while under the service of Sanseverino in ch. "Tra Lorenzo de' Medici e Roberto Sanseverino" in *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera* 5-35.

resulted in a precarious political situation and much unrest.³¹ The majority of criticism incorrectly sustains that Pulci's position with Sanseverino was a punishment for his polemics, a sort of unofficial exile aimed at distancing Pulci from Medici matters.

Marcello Simonetta suggests that Pulci's transition to the service of Roberto Sanseverino may have begun as early as 1471, well before the polemics with Ficino and Franco had matured.³² Pulci's final years of dual-service to Sanseverino and Lorenzo were most likely to fill Lorenzo's need of a valuable and loyal diplomat in a delicate situation. Pulci was at the service of both Lorenzo and Sanseverino, always with the best interests of Lorenzo, the Medici, and Florence in mind.

Most of what we know of Pulci's diplomatic role is obtained from his surviving letters. Pulci's letters are a valuable source for insight into his day-to-day life. In addition to diplomatic affairs, his letters evidence his relationship with Lorenzo. Some of the letters written by Pulci to Lorenzo are requests for financial assistance.³³ Pulci also dedicates sonnets to Lorenzo and declares his affliction at being distant from his "cucco."³⁴ Pulci's surviving letters, the *Morgante*, and his minor works provide the primary texts from which an image of Luigi Pulci the person and the poet emerges.

³¹ See Polcri 26.

³² See Simonetta 197-210.

³³ Lorenzo did assist Pulci from time to time with his financial affairs and also intervened when false creditors tried to claim whatever few possessions Pulci may have had. See Volpi, *Luigi Pulci. Studio biografico* 10-11.

³⁴ "Cucco" and "compagnuzzo" are some of the terms of endearment used by Pulci when referring to Lorenzo. See Villoresi, *La letteratura cavalleresca* 118.

1.5 Cultural Shift: 1473-74

During the biennium of 1473 and 1474 Medici cultural interests underwent a significant shift. The primary cultural interests in the palace on Via Larga transitioned from the jocular amusements of the *brigata* to the theological discourse of Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonism. Lorenzo drew closer to Ficino's philosophy: a hybrid form of Neoplatonism and Christianity. This cultural shift in the Medici house proved costly to Pulci. Ficino's cultural agenda challenged and eventually replaced Pulci's cultural program rooted in medieval traditions and comic poetry.

As Lorenzo ascended as the de facto leader of the Florentine Republic he undoubtedly felt the pressure to reform from his youthful *brigata* years. Not all those around Lorenzo took delight in the lack of seriousness that encircled the *brigata*. In "Ficino e il platonismo di Lorenzo" Sebastiano Gentile states:

Ma per quanto ci è dato sapere, dopo il 1469 non vi fu un'immediata 'conversione' al platonismo da parte di Lorenzo, né una sua particolare vicinanza al Ficino. Per contro proprio al 1469 risalirebbe la composizione da parte di Lorenzo del *Simposio*, in cui egli parodiava la filosofia ficiniana dell'amore. A ciò si aggiunge il fatto che negli anni subito successivi alla morte del padre, Lorenzo venne ripreso e criticato per il danno che recava alla sua immagine pubblica il troppo tempo speso a intrattenersi col gentil sesso. (25)

The shift from comic, realistic to Neoplatonic is visible in the stylistic change in Lorenzo's literary output. The literary exploits of the *brigata* demonstrated in the works of the *La caccia col falcone* and the *La Nencia da Barberino* eventually gave way to a much more philosophical literature seen in Lorenzo's Ficinian *De summo bono* written between the second half of 1473 and the first half of 1474.³⁵ This work takes the form of a philosophical

³⁵ See Bruscagli 33-38; Gentile, "Ficino e il platonismo di Lorenzo" 23-48; Hankins ch. "Lorenzo de' Medici as a student of Ficino: The *De summo bono*" in *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* 319-49.

debate between the protagonist Lauro and the shepherd Alfeo. The two eventually encounter Marsilio who enlightens them with regard to the question of the Supreme Good. In addressing this question Lauro, representative of Lorenzo, supports the Neoplatonic position.

James Hankins states: “the *DSB* is about conversion. As always in the Neoplatonic tradition, conversion implies purification, turning away from the external world of nature and senses, turning within and upwards towards the source of Being” (*Humanism and Platonism* 337). Upon completion of the *De summo bono* Lorenzo’s interest turns away from Pulci’s brand of literature and towards a period of intense study under the tutelage of Ficino.

Lorenzo was praised for his resumption of study by members of Florence’s elite.³⁶ The cultural transformation extended beyond the literary sphere. It was during this same time that new laws were enacted that maintained modesty in funerals and banquets, and imposed regulations on gambling.³⁷ While the *brigata* was a fine group for juvenile distractions, it was not a fitting band for the new leader of Florence.

As a result of this cultural shift, Pulci moved from the center of the juvenile former culture to the fringes of a new more serious culture. Pulci was pushed to the margins of a culture in which his active participation was highly valued just a short time before. Pulci’s unwillingness to fade away quietly into cultural insignificance had well documented repercussions. During his alienation from Medici culture Pulci became embroiled in two notable literary polemics with Matteo Franco and Marsilio Ficino.

³⁶ See Gentile, “Ficino e il platonismo di Lorenzo” 26.

³⁷ See Jordan 32.

1.6 Overview of Polemics

Pulci's inclination to slander was not entertainment for all; there were obviously those who bore the brunt of Pulci's vehement verse. It is certain that sometime between 1460 and 1465 tension arose between Pulci and Bartolomeo Scala, the same scholar whose lectures provided the occasion for Pulci's entrance in the Medici house. In 1465 Pulci wrote a letter to Lorenzo lamenting the promotion of Scala to *cancelliere del Comune*.³⁸

Pulci persisted in composing sonnets denigrating Scala. Scala was the son of a miller; a detail not easily forgotten by Pulci. Many of Pulci's harsh words directed at Scala sarcastically focus on the use of *farina* as an amazingly effective means for upward social mobility. Scala was unwilling to respond to Pulci's insults and remained content to allow Pulci's wrath to pass and refocus elsewhere. In the attacks on Scala one is able to see the aggressive, unrelenting personality trait that Pulci found difficult to tame. Pulci's tension with Scala was just the beginning of a period of twenty years permeated by controversy.

Pulci's rise in Medici favor and his unique, sometimes abrasive, personality created other adversaries. Matteo Franco, a young priest just entering Medici circles in the early 1470s, found an aversion for Pulci probably rooted in a jealousy for Pulci's proximity to Lorenzo. Pulci and Franco exchanged approximately seventy odious sonnets. Franco initiated the poetic competition, but took exception when Pulci accused him of irreverent ways. Franco countered by questioning Pulci's interest in the supernatural. In contrast to Scala, Franco was a worthy and willing adversary fond of the same invective-tinged verse that appealed to Pulci. The polemic eventually degenerated into vulgar slander.

³⁸ For more on the polemic between Pulci and Scala see Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 59-80. Decaria sustains that Pulci and Castellani were members of the oldest oligarchies of the city who felt threatened by this new found class-mobility evidenced by the rise of Scala, who came from a modest family.

Marsilio Ficino followed Franco's suit. The fierce invectives between Pulci and Ficino materialized in the form of sonnets and letters. Pulci composed sonnets of religious parody. Ficino wrote Latin missives lamenting Pulci's treatment of the sacred. Pulci then took direct aim at Ficino and his philosophy in a series of sonnets mocking Ficino's philosophy.

As the cultural shift became more evident, it was clear that Ficino's cultural program threatened that of Pulci and vice versa. Pulci became the representation of a culture that Ficino wanted to replace, whereas Pulci did not understand Ficino's cultural program and felt threatened. From these polemics Pulci earned a reputation as a heretic.

1.7 Pulci's Last *Confessione*

During Pulci's final years he wrote his *Confessione* in *ottava rima*. In this work, dated to 1483, the *io* protagonist declares to have accepted the Madonna as his savior. He rewrites each of his controversial writings one by one. Critics debate the sincerity of Pulci's *Confessione* as they have been conditioned by centuries of Pulci criticism underscoring his apathy towards religion. However, Pulci's *Confessione* is a document written at the end of his life, having no bearing on the final outcome of events that have already transpired. For this—and other reasons to be discussed—Pulci's sincerity in the *Confessione* need not be questioned.

In the *Confessione* Pulci identifies Fra Mariano da Gennazzano as leading him down a righteous path, after having been scared away initially by an aggressive *cherubino* (lines 277-78). In *Le muse dei Pulci* Stefano Carrai identifies Girolamo Savonarola as the *cherubino* (178). Carrai sees the traces of a nascent polemic between Pulci and Savonarola

during Savonarola's first stay in Florence. Savonarola never forgot his disdain for Pulci and the *Morgante*. Pulci died in the Fall of 1484, although he was not allowed to rest in peace.³⁹ Upon Savonarola's return to Florence and rise to prominence, he burned many copies of the *Morgante*.

1.8 History of Pulci and *Morgante* Studies

The literary atmosphere in which the *Morgante* was produced was receptive to vernacular texts. However, this had not always been the case.⁴⁰ In the late 1300s and the early 1400s the vernacular literary medium, even the works of the *tre corone*, was viewed as inferior to Latin. In the Fall of 1441 Leon Battista Alberti conceived the *Certame coronario*: a poetic competition to promote the vernacular's worth. The competition took place in Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore; the competition's theme was *la vera amicizia*.

The winner was to be awarded a crown of silver laurel. However, the competition failed; all of the judges were humanists fond of Latin. They deemed all of the proposed poems as mediocre. Riccardo Brusciagli states that the judges "avrebbero fatto fallire intenzionalmente il *Certame* perché irritati dal fatto che una lingua come l'italiano avesse preteso di gareggiare con il latino" (20). Regardless of the outcome, the *Certame coronario* may be viewed as a turning point for vernacular literature. Throughout the course of the fifteenth century vernacular poetry's esteem steadily grew.

³⁹ For more on the final years of Pulci's life see Böninger, "Notes on the Last Years of Luigi Pulci (1477-1484)."

⁴⁰ For the most thorough history of Pulci criticism leading up to the 1950s see Scrivano, "Luigi Pulci nella storia della critica." Picking up almost where Scrivano ends is Rati, "Luigi Pulci e la critica (1944-1984)." Also valuable to this review of Pulci criticism are Lèbano's introduction to his bibliography "Cent'anni di Bibliografia Pulciana" and his annotated bibliography "Un decennio di studi pulciani: 1984-1994."

During the age of Cosimo and a young Lorenzo that vernacular poetry cemented its place in a literary culture previously dominated by Latin texts. The vernacular became, once again, an acceptable and valuable means of poetic expression, equal in prestige and effectiveness to Latin. The vernacular was an acceptable form to transmit not only the popular tales of the *cantastorie*, but also religious poetry of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Feo Belcari, and Bernardo Pulci.

It was in this literary ambience that Luigi Pulci served as a bridge between popular vernacular culture and the educated humanist circles of the privileged class. On a material level, Pulci's *Morgante* appealed to popular taste through colorful battles and chivalric caricatures. Some scenes, such as Astarotte's theological discourse, enjoyed an elevated style and appealed to learned readers who needed to find loftier values than Margutte's inebriation and Morgante's destruction.

Despite Pulci's religious polemics, the *Morgante* gained immediate popularity and diffusion. Even before the completed 28-canto version, Duke Ercole d'Este of Ferrara sent a letter to his envoy in Florence in November of 1478: "Haressimo a caro de haver un libro chiamato Morgante però Vi preghiamo che Vi intendiati cum uno che si chiama Alovise Pulçi."⁴¹ The 23-canto version was not received by all with such open arms, as alluded to in Canto XXV of Pulci's epic poem:

E so che andar diritto mi bisogna,
ch'io non ci mescolassi una bugia,
ché questa non è istoria da menzogna;
ché, come io esco un passo della via,
chi gracchia, chi riprende, e chi rampogna;
ognun poi mi riesce la pazzia;
tanto che eletto ho solitaria vita,

⁴¹ Qtd. fr. Davie, "Pulci's Half-serious Rhymes" 30n21. Stefano Carrai also notes the presence of the *Morgante* in an "inventario di codici estensi" dated to January 5, 1474 ("«Morgante» di Luigi Pulci" 6).

ché la turba di questi è infinita.⁴² (116)

These critics so ready to pounce on even the slightest of Pulci's missteps undoubtedly included Matteo Franco and Marsilio Ficino.

During Savonarolian Florence of the 1490s many copies of the *Morgante* were burned along with copies of the *Decameron* and other so-called unorthodox texts. On the first of November 1494 Savonarola attacked Pulci's *Morgante* from the pulpit: "O voi che avete le case vostre piene di vanità e di figure e cose disoneste e libri scelerati, e il *Morgante* e altri versi contra la fede, portateli a me questi, per farne fuoco o un sacrificio a Dio."⁴³ The accusations of heresy from Franco and Ficino were certainly reinforced by Savonarola and may be viewed as the earliest critical reception of Pulci and the *Morgante*; a critical reception severely conditioned by personal polemics.

Leonardo da Vinci and Niccolò Machiavelli held a particular appreciation for Pulci's linguistic innovation. Leonardo utilized Pulci's *Vocabolista* as a linguistic model.⁴⁴ Utilization of Pulci's *Morgante* for advancement of the vernacular became accepted as the poem's most valuable use. Whereas the *Morgante*'s linguistic worth was valued, it was negatively deemed a burlesque parody of the chivalric tradition.

In the early sixteenth century there was an appreciation for the liberal use of the fantastic, the satirical, and the grotesque. Pulci's itinerant poetic world and liberal *inventio* influenced the colorful characters and scenes of the macaronic Teofilo Folengo and François Rabelais. Opinions of impiety persisted, so there were attempts to rewrite Pulci's masterpiece eliminating any possible points of heterodoxy. Ludovico Domenichi in 1545 and Bartolomeo

⁴² As this octave pertains to the critical reception of the 23-canto version by Pulci's contemporaries see Davie, *Pulci's Half-serious Rhymes* 24; Lèbano, *Morgante* 907.

⁴³ Qtd. fr. Villari 63.

⁴⁴ See Scrivano 235 and n15. For a brief description of Pulci's *Vocabolista* work see Lèbano, *Morgante* xiv.

Sermartelli in 1574 composed *rifacimenti* of the *Morgante* to purge it of risqué passages. In the seventeenth century Pulci and the *Morgante* all but disappeared.

For the first seventy years of the eighteenth century, Pulci criticism began where sixteenth-century criticism left off. There was a renewed appreciation for Pulci's language and fantasy; however, the *Morgante* was still considered a burlesque work lacking seriousness, diminishing the poem's perceived value. In Gian Vincenzo Gravina's *Della ragion poetica* (1771) one may see an initial break from the mold: Gravina identifies an underlying seriousness in the *Morgante*. Gravina locates Pulci's *inventio* within the historical-literary environment of Medicean Florence, identifying reflections of Pulci's culture within the *Morgante* (108-10). This approach to Pulci's work set the stage for nineteenth-century Pulci studies.

Nonetheless, the idea of the *Morgante* as a burlesque still permeated nineteenth-century Pulci criticism as attempts to highlight the poem's seriousness struggled to break free from the poem's established reception as a parody. The early nineteenth-century view of the *Morgante* revolved around a question of worth: Is the *Morgante* a serious poem worthy of study, or a simple parody? Ugo Foscolo seemed to have a mixed view on the *Morgante*, concluding that Pulci was a "genio rozzo" (170).

Romantic criticism of Pulci and the *Morgante* reaches its climax in Francesco De Sanctis's treatment of the poem. In the published form of his *lezioni zurighesi* from 1858-59 De Sanctis states:

Poliziano ebbe la nuova forma, ma non il nuovo contenuto. . . . Ma frattanto altri poeti, il Pulci, il Cieco da Ferrara, il Bojardo creavano ciò che a lui mancava. Da un lato stavano la bella forma, dall'altro il nuovo contenuto, quando Ariosto, il vero sommo rappresentante del ciclo cavalleresco, sorse e li unì insieme. (*La poesia cavalleresca* 8)

De Sanctis concludes that Pulci's characters maintain an exclusively superficial being; he suggests that Pulci's characters lack artistic representation "delle emozioni, de' sentimenti," especially his female characters (*Il Morgante* 283). De Sanctis held that the highest representation of Pulci's artistic originality is found in the figure of Astarotte (*La poesia cavalleresca* 39-41).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, critics began to look beyond the *Morgante* for other means of understanding the poet. This approach spawned new developments in Pulci criticism. In 1869 Pio Rajna discovered an anonymous *Orlando* and identified it as a main source for Pulci's *Morgante minore*.⁴⁵ Although this claim continues to be debated, Rajna's discovery reinvigorated Pulci studies.⁴⁶ Developments with regard to Pulci's biography surfaced with Guglielmo Volpi's indispensable "Luigi Pulci. Studio Biografico." Volpi's biographical study continues to be the authoritative text on Pulci's life.

Pulci studies in the twentieth century are inaugurated by the close readings of the *Morgante* by Attilio Momigliano and Carlo Pellegrini. In *L'indole e il riso* (1905) Attilio Momigliano identifies a tragic "pianto" behind the "riso" of Pulci (5). Taking into account both Pulci's letters and the *Morgante*, Momigliano declares: "Le sue lettere, infatti, sono meno gaie, di quanto ci aspetteremmo dopo la lettura del *Morgante* e, con quello strano miscuglio di risa e di lamenti, sono testimonianza, non di una natura invincibilmente allegra, ma della contemporaneità di due tendenze opposte." Momigliano states that Pulci was one who was capable of forgetting his "dolori" momentarily, producing moments of extreme

⁴⁵ See Rajna, "La materia del «Morgante» in un ignoto poema cavalleresco del secolo XV."

⁴⁶ For a thorough review of the debate over the anonymous *Orlando's* relation to the *Morgante* see Davie, *Half-serious Rhymes* 13-19. For a direct challenge to Rajna's findings see Orvieto, "Sul rapporto *Morgante-Orlando Laurenziano*." Marco Villaresi proposes that the *Morgante* and the anonymous *Orlando* were possibly based on a third text in prose (*Letteratura cavalleresca* 128). See also Carrai, "Luigi Pulci nella storia del poema cavalleresco."

gaiety. However, these torments could return to afflict him at any moment, causing great despair (85-86).

Carlo Pellegrini's *Luigi Pulci, L'uomo e l'artista* (1913) follows a similar focus as that of Momigliano; that is, to illuminate the *Morgante* through a thorough comprehension of the author's personality and mental disposition. Pellegrini correlates Florentine society to the style and structure seen in the *Morgante*:

Come la vita a Firenze ai tempi del Pulci era priva di un nucleo intorno al quale si svolgesse tutta la sua attività, così questo manca nel *Morgante*, dove si trovano mirabilmente riflesse le varie tendenze dell'anima contemporanea . . . c'è la preoccupazione religiosa e filosofica propria di molte persone del quattrocento, oscillanti fra la religione e certe nuove correnti di pensiero vagamente avvertite. (151)

Pellegrini's approach lends itself to the study of Astarotte's theological discourse to be conducted in the third chapter of this study. Astarotte's voice may be seen as the voice of the most innovative religious philosophy of Pulci's time.

Also of note from Pellegrini's study is his view of Pulci as a religious believer. Pellegrini addresses Pulci's heretical reputation: "che non ebbe mai idee religiose nette, definite, precise; come del resto, molti suoi contemporanei. Con questo non si nega che Pulci fosse religioso" (40). Pellegrini cites many instances of rewritten Scripture in the *Morgante* and Pulci's familiarity with religious texts to further support his thesis.

De Robertis describes Giovanni Getto's *Studio sul Morgante* (1944) as "il ponte di passaggio tra il vecchio e il nuovo corso" of Pulci criticism (*Morgante e lettere* lxii). Edoardo Lèbano hails Getto's study as one of the soundest critiques on Pulci's creative genius (*Morgante* xxii). While identifying medieval influences throughout Pulci's poem, Getto also writes of Pulci's modernity:

. . . quel gusto di avventura, di esplorazione e di scoperta, di nuovo e di non mai visto, che, operando su di un piano tutto estetico di sillabe e metri,

vocaboli e frasi, suoni e colori, corrisponde tuttavia a quello spirito di avventura e di scoperta che agì fortemente nel quattrocento e si incarnò nelle due simboliche personalità di Colombo e di Leonardo. (186)

However, Getto ultimately negates any unity in the *Morgante* beyond the aesthetic realm.

Franca Ageno makes a valuable contribution to Pulci studies with her 1955 critical edition of the *Morgante*. Ageno's essays, contemporaneous with her critical edition, illuminate the difference between the *Morgante minore* and *La rotta di Roncisvalle* as well as chronological questions surrounding the earliest editions of the poem. Ageno insists that the first 23 cantos and the last five be treated as two separate poems. She advances studies of Pulci's language, stressing his decision to employ a "fiorentinità popolare e plebea" while carrying out a parody-filled "degradazione della materia" (*Morgante* xxv-xxvi).

Equal to Ageno's contributions in advancing Pulci studies are those of Domenico De Robertis. His *Storia del Morgante* (1958) is a fundamental work building on Rajna's proposal that Pulci utilized an already existent *Orlando* as a primary source for the *Morgante minore*. De Robertis identifies Pulci's invention amongst imitation from a textual comparison of the *Morgante* and the anonymous *Orlando*.

De Robertis declares that Pulci, a young Lorenzo, and a handful of others found their impetus in "domestiche muse." In addition to identifying Pulci's *domestiche muse* as anti-traditional, De Robertis declares them as representative of a certain lifestyle and a corresponding mode of literature (*Morgante e lettere* xlvi). Pulci's writings exemplified this style so characteristic of Lorenzo's *brigata* through the employment of a certain Florentine vernacular. De Robertis also provided a scholarly edition of the *Morgante* followed by a valuable collection of Pulci's letters.

In the late 1970s Pulci studies were reinvigorated once again by Paolo Orvieto's *Pulci medievale*. Orvieto detects an underlying allegory in the final five cantos of the *Morgante*

identifying Marsilio Ficino behind the literary guise of Re Marsilio, the traitorous Saracen King. While critics recognized a change in tone between the first 23 cantos and the final five cantos, Orvieto's study calls attention to the allegory employed in the final part of the *Morgante* after the polemic with Ficino.

Orvieto followed his celebrated book with perhaps the most revolutionary study in regards to Pulci's sonnets: "Uno 'scandolo' del '400: Luigi Pulci e i sonetti di parodia religiosa." In this scholarly article Orvieto successfully disproves the attribution of *Costor che fan sí gran disputazione* to Pulci. The controversial sonnet, previously believed to be of Pulci's pen, was considered one of his most blasphemous. Pulci's contemporaries, and most literary critics, considered the sonnet as evidence of Pulci's heresy or, at the very least, his status as a nonbeliever. With the most reproachful of Pulci's sonnets no longer attributed to him, a reevaluation of Pulci's other works, especially his sonnets, is wanting.

Orvieto's groundbreaking studies were followed by Stefano Carrai's 1985 book, *Le muse dei Pulci*. Carrai reinforces Orvieto's earlier allegorical interpretation of the *Morgante*. Carrai identifies the allegorical presence of the Last Judgment in the *Morgante*'s final cantos.⁴⁷ He also examines closely the Franco-Pulci polemic and identifies a budding polemic between Pulci and Girolamo Savonarola.⁴⁸

The critical examinations by Orvieto and Carrai may be seen as the inauguration of a new critical treatment of centuries-old texts. Their studies revitalized a field cemented in centuries-old, unquestioned archetypes. The most recent publications, Alessio Decaria's

⁴⁷ See Carrai, ch. "Il giudizio universale nel 'Morgante'" in *Le muse dei Pulci. Studi su Luca e Luigi Pulci* 113-72.

⁴⁸ For Carrai's treatment of the Franco-Pulci polemic see ch. "Schede per i sonetti di Luigi e del Franco"; for his identification of the Pulci-Savonarola polemic see ch. "La datazione della «Confessione» e le tracce della polemica fra Luigi e il Savonarola" both found in *Le muse dei Pulci. Studi su Luca e Luigi Pulci* 75-84, 173-88.

Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani and Alessandro Polcri's *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera*, substantiate and advance the theories proposed by Orvieto and Carrai. While Polcri explores other allegorical representations throughout the *Morgante*, Decaria examines Pulci's personal relationship with Matteo di Francesco Castellani.⁴⁹ The purpose of the current study is to build upon the studies by Orvieto and Carrai, Decaria and Polcri with specific regard to Pulci's polemics and the resulting doubt surrounding his religiosity.

⁴⁹ I am especially indebted to the recent publications of Decaria and Polcri. These texts are very thorough in reviewing past arguments, providing new *spunti* for discussion, and maintaining accurate and precise bibliographies and notes.

Chapter II

The Polemics

Before examining Astarotte's theological discourse in Canto XXV, it is necessary to review the events and writings that constituted Pulci's polemics. The polemic between Pulci and Ficino materialized in sonnets and letters, and ultimately in the *Morgante*. The polemic with Ficino was not the only one in which Pulci was embroiled. Two defined polemics took root before the clash with Ficino, factoring into the subsequent quarrel with Ficino. The first was carried out in a series of sonnets written by Pulci permeated by religious parody. Pulci is actually condemning religious hypocrites and bigots in these sonnets. While Pulci used these sonnets to question the motivation of pilgrims and the erring ways of priests, Pulci's detractors used the writings to characterize him as a heretic.

The polemic with Matteo Franco began in the midst of the sonnets of religious parody and slightly prior to the polemic with Ficino. Pulci and Franco exchanged many colorful sonnets to the delight of the Florentine public. These sonnets and their content lend insight into Pulci's religious standing and the Ficino polemic. Ficino initially remained neutral as Franco and Pulci tangled. Eventually Ficino coordinated attacks with his friend, and fellow priest.⁵⁰

The Pulci-Ficino polemic is important for a multitude of reasons. First and foremost, the polemic may be viewed as the result of a cultural transformation in Laurentian Florence

⁵⁰ For coordinated attacks by Ficino and Franco see Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 224-30.

occurring in the 1470s. In *Pulci medievale* Paolo Orvieto aptly describes the two cultures at odds, one represented by Pulci and the other by Ficino:

. . . due professioni culturali e possiamo ben dire anche filosofiche diametralmente opposte: l'una rivoluzionaria, neoplatonica (intensamente religiosa, ma attraverso la mediazione platonica), l'altra conservatrice, scolastico-aristotelica, direttamente biblica, ostinatamente allegorica; l'una sottilmente dialettica, testimonianza d'una ristrettissima *élite* culturale, l'altra in aperto contrasto con quelle dispute, portavoce d'una cultura ormai sedimentata. (220)

In “Luigi Pulci e le «domestiche Muse»” Domenico De Robertis addresses Pulci's cultural embodiment: “Pulci significa – se non una società – un particolare ambiente, un circolo di persone, un certo circolo letterario, quello in cui egli stesso si moveva; l'aria che respirava” (162). It is exactly one of the cultures explained by Orvieto, previously noted by De Robertis, that Pulci represents.

Ficino deemed his philosophy as divine, while Pulci, demonstrating intolerance for religious innovation, attacked Ficino's philosophy. As a cultural shift became more apparent, Ficino aimed to reduce Pulci's role, that of a popular poet, in Florentine culture. Ficino's attempts to bolster his own aims, those of a divine philosopher, took form through the impious label assigned to Pulci.

Pulci's name has been synonymous with the label of heretic since the 1470s, conditioning critical studies of Pulci's minor works and the *Morgante*.⁵¹ Before examining Pulci's allegory in Canto XXV, it is necessary to defog the critical lens tinged with both Renaissance and post-Renaissance claims of heresy. To achieve a clear perspective, this chapter incorporates all relevant primary and critical texts. A chronological document by

⁵¹ For a recent study that maintains Pulci as a nonbeliever see Corsaro, “Parodia del sacro dal Medioevo al Rinascimento.” For a list of Pulci critics who have written with regard to Pulci's religious sentiment see Lèbano, “Luigi Pulci and Late Fifteenth-Century Humanism in Florence” 497 and n21. For an earlier bibliography of such works see Momigliano, *L'indole e il riso di Luigi Pulci* 56.

document recreation of Pulci's polemics will contextualize them within the shifting cultural politics of Florence and ultimately clarify the label of heretic so obstructive to Pulci studies.

There has been no comprehensive study of the polemics in their entirety. The most thorough examination of the Pulci-Ficino polemic to date is found in Paolo Orvieto's *Pulci Medievale*.⁵² Orvieto followed his much celebrated book with an equally groundbreaking article, "Uno 'scandolo' del '400: Luigi Pulci ed i sonetti di parodia religiosa," in which he successfully contests the attribution of the most scandalous sonnet originally believed to be of Pulci's pen. Since the Orvieto studies there have been other relevant studies shedding light on the polemic, warranting a reexamination.⁵³

2.1 Initial Tension with the "Accademia"

Many critics have identified a budding tension between Pulci and the Neoplatonic Academy in a letter from Pulci to Lorenzo on August 31, 1473. Almost all critics view the following letter sent to Lorenzo from Bologna as the first evidence of tension between Pulci and Ficino's circle:

Tu harai detto ch' io afrettai il partire per non trovarmi coll' academia.
Lasciagli venire in qua, et sentirai ch'io te ne scardassi qualcuno, se mi
capiteranno alle mani, e da loro sapremo come andorno le muse; et se io non
havessi havuto gran fretta, ti contentavo costì; ma io ti farò più honore di qua,
dove molti udiranno.⁵⁴

⁵² For the most thorough examination of Pulci's polemics see Carrai, ch. "Schede per i sonetti di Luigi e del Franco" in *Le muse dei Pulci* 75-84 ; Orvieto, ch. "Crisi e decadenza del Pulci" in *Pulci medievale* 213-43.

⁵³ In addition to the studies offered by Paolo Orvieto and Stefano Carrai there are other key critical texts shedding light on the Pulci polemics and valuable to this section of the present study: Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani*; Lèbano, "Luigi Pulci and Fifteenth-Century Humanism"; Lèbano, Intro. and commentary to *Morgante*; Polcri, *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera*; Verde, *Lo Studio fiorentino 1473-1503*, Vol. 4.

⁵⁴ Qtd. fr. De Robertis, *Morgante e lettere* 986.

Identifying this passage as an indication of tension between Pulci and Ficino proves to be problematic. A closer examination yields a much more ambiguous letter than it initially appears.

In “The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence” James Hankins builds off Arnaldo Della Torre’s lexical treatment of the Latin word *academia*.⁵⁵ Hankins expands Della Torre’s three senses of the word to seven: grove of the hero Academus, philosophical tradition, private humanist school, synonym for *universitas* or *stadium*, any regular gathering of men, location for philosophical studies, and synonym for *libri platonici* (433-35). Hankins explains that he conducted exhaustive research: he read all works and correspondences in which the term *academia* may have been used to reference Ficino and his circle. Hankins states his astounding results:

Apart from Ficino’s correspondence, there is but one solid piece of evidence, from Benedetto Colucci. . . . For the rest there is only a handful of ambiguous references to an “academy,” none of them securely identifiable with a Platonic Academy grouped around Ficino. (437-38)

Hankins further addresses Pulci’s reference to an *academia* in the August letter quoted above:

. . . the context of the letter makes it clear that this “academy” is the new University of Florence. When the university was refounded in 1473, the Florentines passed a decree requiring all Tuscans to attend only the University of Florence-Pisa, and agents were sent out to the various towns, where informal *studia* had sprung up, to encourage the students to move to Pisa. Lorenzo evidently suspected that Pulci, in Bologna, was not helping the cause, so Pulci wrote to reassure Lorenzo that he was doing everything possible to praise Lorenzo and his new university.⁵⁶ (439)

⁵⁵ See Della Torre, *Storia dell’Accademia platonica di Firenze* 463.

⁵⁶ Orvieto believes that Pulci intends Ficino and his circle with the word *academia*. Orvieto cites *Morgante* 25.116-17 to support his thesis (*Pulci medievale* 218-19). However, the octave cited by Orvieto including the word *academia* could easily refer to the other senses noted by Hankins.

Further supporting the proposal by Hankins, and disproving the established starting date for the tensions between Pulci and Ficino, is the letter from Pulci to Lorenzo in February of 1474, six months after the August letter. In the February letter—to be discussed in the following section—Pulci and Ficino are on good terms. Some critics simply treat this as an inexplicable cooling of tensions; however, it is quite probable that tensions had not yet arisen.⁵⁷

Hankins's proposal, and parenthetical citation for that matter, ignores the rather aggressive lines that follow in which Pulci declares to flay members of the academy. These are rather strong words for someone who is simply avoiding an assigned task of collegiate recruiting. If Pulci did intend Ficino and his intellectual circle in the August 1471 letter, there is still no proof that Pulci's budding disdain was known to anyone other than Lorenzo. It is probable that there was no tension between Pulci and Ficino until after February of 1474.⁵⁸

2.2 Matteo Franco: A Formidable Opponent

The sonnets exchanged by Franco and Pulci are less studied by critics; they are however, no less ferocious than those directed at Ficino by Pulci. When the tension between Franco and Pulci began, Pulci was a mainstay in the Medici palace on Via Larga despite his diplomatic *andirivieni*; whereas Franco, a parish priest of humble Florentine origins, was just beginning to frequent Medici circles. Franco undoubtedly was trying to establish himself in Medici matters. Eventually the polemics with Franco and Ficino overlapped chronologically,

⁵⁷ Alessandro Polcri proposes that there could have possibly been a cooling of tensions (20).

⁵⁸ The outcomes of this study support Lèbano's statement that tensions occurred after February of 1474, probably in 1475 (*Morgante* xvii; "Luigi Pulci and Late Fifteenth-Century Humanism in Florence" 492).

the two appeared to coordinate their attacks on Pulci behind impious claims.⁵⁹ However, it is during the initial Franco polemic that Pulci's orthodoxy was first questioned.

Literary critics have described Franco as a controversial figure. In "Tre Amici" Giuseppe Morpurgo declares that Franco was "una delle figure meno simpatiche di quante mai apparvero sulla scena della Firenze quattrocentesca" (43). In "Un cortigiano di Lorenzo il Magnifico" Volpi states: "È curioso notare che quanti stavano intorno Matteo Franco o l'amavano di un amore sviscerato o l'odiavano di un odio profondo" (239). Pulci's sentiments for Franco definitely pertained to Volpi's latter characterization; the feeling was mutual.

Matteo Franco was known for his aggressive literary attacks. Clarice Orsini, Lorenzo's wife, states the risky undertaking of engaging Franco in literary combat: "Harei caro non essere in favola del Franco, come fu Luigi Pulci."⁶⁰ Bernardo Bellincioni, with whom Franco was also ensnared in a literary polemic, accused Franco of caring more for women and money than for his priestly duties.⁶¹ It was along the same battle lines drawn by Bellincioni that Pulci responded to Franco's initial sonnet.

Hostilities began after October of 1473.⁶² The poetic warfare between Pulci and Franco materialized in an exchange of provocative sonnets. Franco initiated the contest with his sonnet *Salve se se' quel poeta Luigi* (I).⁶³ In this sonnet Franco asks Pulci about remedies

⁵⁹ For collaboration between Franco and Ficino on their attacks against Pulci see Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 209-36.

⁶⁰ Qtd. fr. Volpi, "Un cortigiano di Lorenzo il Magnifico ed alcune sue lettere" 244.

⁶¹ See Lèbano, *Morgante* xxviii-xxix n64.

⁶² For this date see Carrai, *Le muse dei Pulci* 75.

⁶³ Unless otherwise noted the sonnets exchanged by Franco and Pulci are qtd. fr. Dolci, *Libro dei sonetti*. The numeration of the sonnets is the same in all editions of the *Libro dei sonetti* and these are the numbers referred to by scholars when addressing the sonnets.

for *mal d'amore*. Pulci's response is interesting as it corrects Franco by modifying his opening line, approximating it to the familiar prayer *Salve Regina: Salve vuol poi Regina e non Luigi* (II).

With just the first line Pulci implies doubt as to Franco's concern with *mal d'amore*. The maladies of love would be a topic considered unbecoming of a priest. Pulci had little patience for clergy who abused their position or behaved in a manner deemed unpriestly. These are the first traces of an anticlericalism that would mature throughout the course of Pulci's polemics.

In the following exchange of sonnets Pulci continues to reprove Franco for being a priest and wanting to talk about *mal d'amore*. A persistent Pulci chooses their respective faiths as the topic for discussion. Franco attempted to steer the discussion elsewhere. Pulci was unwavering in his desire to dispute Franco's irreverent behavior. All the while, Pulci provided himself as an example for Franco to follow with sonnets such as *I' mi credea, che dell' Eucarista* (IV).

Although Pulci was known to partake in after-hours séances with members of Florence's elite, taken to task for this in sonnet XV by Franco, he was in good religious standing.⁶⁴ Alessandro Polcri points out Pulci's acceptance at the end of 1472 into the *Compagnia dei Magi* as an indication of his good religious standing:

Se la sua appartenenza alla Compagnia è vera, come è vera, allora non so come si possa davvero considerare Pulci irreligioso, dato che proprio pochi anni prima, nel 1467, la Compagnia dei Magi era passata da essere Compagnia di stendardo a Compagnia di disciplina (cioè era ora capeggiata da

⁶⁴ Franco takes Pulci to task for being a guest of the Neroni family where such *sedute spiritiche* were common; see Lèbano, *Morgante* xvii. An examination of Pulci's dabbling with the occult magic would be interesting and undoubtedly contribute much to a discourse on claims of heresy; however, a study of the sort would also require an extensive cultural study of occult practices in fifteenth-century Florence. A study of this magnitude will have to wait for another occasion.

un religioso, il Padre governatore, e tutti i membri dovevano essere di provata religiosità; addirittura molti di loro scrivevano sermoni per essa). (55)

The mere fact that Pulci decided to introduce religion as a topic for discussion, questioning Franco's devotion, underscores Pulci's belief of his own impeccable religious standing.⁶⁵ It is ironic that Pulci led the literary clash in this direction. The discord with Franco was the tip of an iceberg that ultimately resulted in Pulci being labeled a heretic.

As the sonnets between Franco and Pulci continued, the subject matter descended to the crude and distasteful. Nothing was off limits as Franco expressed his desire for Luigi to join his dead brother Luca in hell (XXXVII). Franco insulted Pulci's physical appearance and sympathized with Pulci's "povera moglie" (XV). Luigi's attacks on Franco concentrated mostly on Franco being a less than honorable priest. However, Luigi did not hesitate to employ the obscene: in sonnet XI Pulci compares Franco to human flatulence.

2.3 A Letter from February 14, 1474

A letter from Luigi Pulci to Lorenzo de' Medici on February 14, 1474 is the first document indicating the feud between Pulci and Franco was in full bloom. In the letter everything is far from tranquil as Pulci seeks to defend his actions and words; the precise occasion for which Pulci is requesting exoneration is vague. Pulci writes to Lorenzo in an exculpatory tone:

Io t'ò scripta questa colla mano che trema per la febbre, perché stamani mi fu da' parenti recati sonetti dove erano coltellate, improverate e molte cose ch'io non sapevo ancora; di che ebbi tanta pena, ch'essendo dianzi in piazza mi ne prese la febbre. È venuto Cino a medicarmi, e dice quello gli hai detto. Io ti prego di questo, che mi dia tanto spazio venga a te, che se non havessi hora tremito sarei venuto, e che tu vogli udire uno tuo servitore prima che lo giudichi con ira e per detto di molti che m'anno a lloro modo in preda. Io mi sono doluto che mai come io fu straziato cane, e che io so chi lo fa; e quando

⁶⁵ See also the letter written by Nannina de' Medici to Lucrezia in section 1.4.

non potrò qui, andrò altrove a rispondergli; e tutto ho sempre tratto a uno segno, e credo tu sia tanto savio che tu m'intenda per discrezione. E de' sonetti aiutati fare, ho tratto sempre a un altro ch'io ho veduto e trovato cogli occhi miei in casa. E òtti mandato a dire che 'l prete t'inganna (per messer Marsilio hiersera gliel dixi), et che va dicendo tu se' tu e Giuliano che lo fate fare, e che ha altre materie alle mani, e che io so tu gli ài detto non facci: che adunque t'à disubbidito, et che tu voglia ora esser dal mio. E con altri ho detto tu non hai creduto la cosa vada tanto oltre come è trascorsa. E fra altre cose, sa Cino e altri io metto versi a ordine in lalde tua e di Piero, e pregoti Luca e figliuoli e tutti noi poveri fratelli e suoi figliuoli ti sieno raccomandati. E volevo finire la Giostra, poi venire a te et pregarti volessi dare favore a me. Né mai hebbi altra intenzione; e contra quelli tali ch'io dico m'è stato messo inanzi cose pazze da metterli in briga anche loro, et nondimeno non ho voluto. Pregoti per lunga servitù et fede mi vogli giudicare, et non mi giudichi in fretta, et acozami con chi vuoi, e ricorderotti le parole come sono ite e a che proposti e con che disperazione. Poi mi fa' porre il capo in sul ceppo et sarò contento, se già io non sono fuori del senno, perché non dormo, non mangio e sono fuori di me, e la mia casa è già 8 dì in pianto, e tu non vedi e non credi queste cose. Il bene vego non t'è raporto, ma Idio lo raporterà; e quando ti sarà passata l'ira, ancora conoscerai t'amo forse più che di quelli che mi t'accusano tutto dì. Fa' infine di me ciò che vuoi; verrò ora, e quando e dove mi dirai, a ogni pena, a ogni suplicio, e credo sarà buono io tolghi un bordone, e colla mia sventurata moglie ch'è qui stasera in questa buon festa, vada peregrinando, poi che sono in odio a Dio, a te, al mondo. Raccomandomi a te.

Luigi Pulci⁶⁶

Pulci critics have thoroughly cited this letter as an initial indication of an ever increasing strain on Pulci and Lorenzo's friendship, ultimately culminating in Pulci's banishment from Florence. This is not the case; on March 21, 1474, just over a month later, Pulci writes a letter to Lorenzo in which all is well.⁶⁷ In the span of a month it seems that any suggested tension between Pulci and Lorenzo had passed.

The events detailed by Pulci in the February letter are quite intriguing. They provide insight into the polemic with Franco and are of a certain chronological significance to the subsequent polemic with Ficino. In the opening of the letter, Pulci declares to have been

⁶⁶ Qtd. fr. De Robertis, *Morgante e Lettere* 991-92.

⁶⁷ For the letter see De Robertis 993. See Polcri 21n44 for other authors who concur that this letter indicates that any problems between Pulci and Lorenzo were resolved rapidly.

attacked by “sonetti che erano coltellate.” As noted by Decaria in *Luigi Pulci e Matteo di Francesco Castellani* (119), these sonnets must have included sonnet LVIII by Franco:

Era ancor Febo con la cispa agli occhi
e gli sbavigli uscien di colombaia;
quand’io m’accorsi d’una certa baia
di quel tuo tristerel, Gigi pidocchi:

«E’ sono un’academia di marmocchi;
dissotterebbon un per una ovaia;
sempre l’un tristo con l’altro s’appaia»;
de’, fa’, Lorenzo mio, teco m’abbocchi.

Sa’ quel ch’i’ vidi da un bucolino?
Gigi mandare un cucciolo in levante;
la civetta, el zimbello e ‘l suo giorgino

chi credi sia? Tu solo e ‘l tuo Morgante.
O sacro Lauro, o spirto alto e divino,
che se’ de’ beni e buoni tanto zelante,

tuo ben’, tue virtù tante,
spender, edificar, sudar per Cristo,
che giova, se tu ami questo tristo?⁶⁸

In *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* Alessio Decaria advances a significant analysis of the February letter, linking it to Franco’s sonnet. Decaria summarizes the events surrounding the February 14 letter from Pulci to Lorenzo:

Dall’epistola pare di capire – ma, a quando credo, è un’interpretazione inedita della lettera – che il fallo di Luigi consista nell’aver parlato di Lorenzo in pubblico; qualcuno dei presenti dovette riportare la notizia all’interessato, che non la prese bene. Il ruolo del Franco nella vicenda sarebbe stato quello di chi, cogliendo l’occasione per nuocere a Luigi, avrebbe dato la massima diffusione all’episodio, magari senza incontrare resistenze in Lorenzo, offeso dal comportamento di Luigi. . . . Luigi avrebbe attaccato l’Accademia platonica e indirettamente, Lorenzo medesimo, in quanto membro e patrocinatore di quel circolo intellettuale. . . . Il fatto grave – per Luigi – è che nei suoi discorsi alla libera riportati dal Franco i panni della *civetta* sono indossati da Lorenzo e ‘l suo giorgino . . . è il Pulci stesso. (119-20)

⁶⁸ Qtd. fr. Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 119. I am indebted to Decaria’s analysis of this sonnet as it pertains to Pulci’s February letter to Lorenzo.

Decaria's valuable analysis certainly clarifies the events surrounding the February 14 letter. However, there is an even more intriguing aspect deduced from certain lines of this letter; a piece of information requiring little scrutiny as it is rather explicit. The intriguing lines are the following: "E òtti mandato a dire che 'l prete t'inganna (per messer Marsilio hiersera gliel dixi)." Messer Marsilio is none other than Ficino.⁶⁹ Pulci sends Ficino to plead his case with Lorenzo in the face of adversity with Franco, supposedly over tension with the Academy. It seems unlikely that Ficino would have been very receptive to this task if Pulci had really slandered Ficino's Academy.

The last lines in which Pulci declares to be "in odio a Dio, a te, al mondo" are a sarcastic paraphrase of Franco's claims. Paolo Orvieto sustains that these lines are taken from a letter sent by Ficino to Luigi's brother Bernardo.⁷⁰ It would seem rather strange for Pulci to mention Ficino as his benevolent messenger, to then lament certain lines in which Ficino attacks him. The letter referenced by Orvieto in this regard seems to come from a tension between Ficino and Pulci yet to occur. The February letter's closing lines demonstrate that during the polemic with Franco Pulci's faith was initially a topic for discussion.

Also of interest from the February letter are the following lines: "E de' sonetti aiutati fare, ho tratto sempre a un altro ch'io ho veduto e trovato cogli occhi miei in casa." Taking into account the tone of this letter, there is no doubt that these lines are exculpatory. They allude to a budding polemic soon to surpass the acrimony created by the Pulci-Franco dispute.

⁶⁹ For the identification of Marsilio Ficino in this passage see De Robertis, *Morgante e Lettere* 1069; Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 122-23; Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)* 425; Polcri, *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera* 19.

⁷⁰ See Orvieto, *Pulci medievale* 221-22.

Franco and others took Pulci to task for sonnets written *a quattro mani*: sonnets authored by another with Pulci's help. The sonnet *Costor che fan sí gran disputazione* is most likely one of the "sonetti aiutati fare." Detractors attributed this sonnet to Pulci in 1474, and for centuries literary critics followed suit.

2.4 A Sonnet by Benedetto Dei

One of the most cited texts as proof of Pulci's heresy is the sonnet *Costor che fan sí gran disputazione*; the sonnet parodies Ficino's treatise on the soul. Although Ficino's *Theologia platonica de immortalitate animarum* was published in 1482, it was completed much earlier and the topic of a lecture series initiated in Florence during the first months of 1474. The controversial sonnet was written during this same time period.

The poem has been attributed to Pulci for centuries. However, a closer examination conducted by Paolo Orvieto in "Uno 'scandolo' del '400: Luigi Pulci e i sonetti di parodia religiosa" convincingly overturns what appears to be a misattribution, facilitated by Pulci's contemporaries. The sonnet believed to be Pulci's by many; however, appropriately attributed to Benedetto Dei is the following:

Costor che fan sí gran disputazione
dell'anima ond'ell'entri o ond'ell'esca,
o come il nocciuol si stia nella pèsca,
hanno studiato in su 'n gran mellone.

Aristotile allegano e Platone
e voglion ch'ella in pace requiesca
fra suoni e canti, e fannoti una tresca
che t'empie il capo con confusione.

L'anima è sol, come si vede espresso,
in un pan bianco caldo un pinocchiato,
o una carbonata in un pan fesso.

Et chi crede altro ha 'l fodero in bucato:
a que' che per l'un cento hanno promesso
ci pagheran di succiole in mercato.

Mi dice un che v'è stato
nell'altra vita e piú non può tornarvi
che appena con la scala si può andarvi,

costor credon trovarvi
e beccafichi e gli ortolan pelati
e buon vin dolci e letti sprimacciati;

e vanno drieto a' frati.
Noi ce n'andrem, Pandolfo, in val di buia
senza sentir piú cantare: Alleluja.⁷¹

The sonnet opens by criticizing those who complicate a discourse on the existence of the soul: philosophers in general (1). The sonnet clearly mocks the idea of the immortality of the soul, reducing it to mundane culinary discourse. The final two tercets question the existence of the afterlife and take to task those who gluttonously hope to attain it for the material pleasures of good food and drink, recalling the culinary discourse in the earlier verses (19-21). Dei sustains that the afterlife is nothing more than a dark valley (24).

Orvieto's attribution of this sonnet to Benedetto Dei is derived from both the circumstances surrounding the sonnet and the lines of the poem itself. Dei included the sonnet in his *Cronaca*: a compilation of historical and artistic writings on the Florentine Republic.⁷² The controversial *Costor che fan* and the five orthodox responses are found appended to the first pages of the *Cronaca*.⁷³ The *Cronaca* was finished before the end of 1473; these pages were added at some subsequent point, most likely in early 1474.

⁷¹ Qtd. fr. Orvieto, "Uno 'scandolo' del '400" 20-21.

⁷² For a description of this work see Orvieto, "Un esperto orientalista" 206.

⁷³ These sonnets are found in Orvieto, "Uno 'scandolo' del '400" 20-22.

There is no doubt that the sonnets following *Costor che fan* are in response: the third and fifth sonnets follow the same rhyme scheme. The responsive sonnets contain certain lines that Orvieto identifies as a *senhal* to Dei's authorship of the polemical sonnet. The lines from the responsive sonnets identifying Dei, highlighted by Orvieto, are the following:

Negare non puoi, e confessare lo *Dei* (II.9)

Però tu che scrivesti in ciò 'l contrario
e divulgastil per un tuo sonetto,
traendo il dire da l'infernale armario,

correggil ora, che tu ssia *Benedetto*:
e non fare il parlar dal nome vario.⁷⁴ (IV.9-13)

Prior to his groundbreaking article on the attribution to Benedetto Dei, Orvieto had already established Feo Belcari as the author of the five sonnets in defense of the immortality of the soul and philosophy in general (*Pulci medievale* 229). Feo Belcari was known as a very religious individual, authoring many *sacre rappresentazioni*.⁷⁵ He was also known as the unofficial resolver of matters of faith.

Orvieto underscores the familiar tone employed in the orthodox sonnets. Orvieto justifies the tone and the sonnets' collocation in the *Cronaca* with the fact that Belcari and Dei were related by marriage. Benedetto Dei's brother Miliano married Feo's daughter Papera. Benedetto spent some time living with Miliano and therefore came into repeated contact with Feo.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Here I retain the italics inserted by Orvieto to highlight the references to Dei ("Uno scandolo del '400" 23-24).

⁷⁵ For more on Belcari's *sacre rappresentazioni* see Martelli, *Letteratura fiorentina* 20-36.

⁷⁶ See Orvieto, *Pulci medievale* 229-31; "Uno 'scandolo' del '400" 23.

Just who was Benedetto Dei? Dei was famous for travels to distant lands, especially Tunisia, Timbuktu, Turkey, and Bosnia.⁷⁷ He enjoyed his fame as one who was an expert on and indulged in the occult. His letters were often filled with references to the supernatural, devils and demons, and Arabic phrases.

Dei also enjoyed sending incendiary writings to those who would find them shocking. This explains the second to last line of *Costor che fan*: “Noi ce n’andrem, Pandolfo, in val di buia” (24). Dei addressed this sonnet to Pandolfo Rucellai who eventually became a Dominican monk, described by Volpi as an “uomo pio” (“Luigi Pulci” 35). There is no doubt that Rucellai was left speechless by the sonnet’s contents.

There is another piece of information supporting the thesis that Pulci was wrongly identified as the author of the sonnet *Costor che fan*. At the end of his life Pulci wrote his *Confessione* in a final attempt to set the record straight. He addresses and rewrites all of the writings that caused so many problems for him in Florence. However, *Costor che fan* and the immortality of the soul are never mentioned throughout the entire *Confessione*. Even as Pulci attempted to right all perceived wrongs, he refused to acknowledge *Costor che fan* as his own, maintaining its authorship was of another.

Benedetto Dei and Luigi Pulci were close friends.⁷⁸ They found themselves together in Milan during the time of this sonnet’s composition. It is possible that Pulci assisted Dei in writing the controversial sonnet *a quattro mani*. Benedetto Dei was the one who conceived

⁷⁷ For more information on Benedetto Dei see Orvieto, “Un esperto orientalista”; Pisani, *Un avventuriero del ‘400*.

⁷⁸ Dei and Pulci had an extensive epistolary correspondence. It was in fact Dei who was charged with informing Pulci’s wife of his death. See Böninger, “Notes on the Last Years of Luigi Pulci (1477-1484)” 259-71.

the content and Pulci helped him fashion the form. Literary collaboration was common in this period, and Pulci was indiscriminate in lending out his talented pen.⁷⁹

Whatever Pulci's role was in composing *Costor che fan*, his association with the sonnet had dire consequences. Pulci's detractors immediately linked him to the sonnet actually authored by Benedetto Dei. Opponents of Pulci and popular poetry in general used Dei's sonnet as an excuse to attack Pulci. Orvieto speaks to the utilization of this sonnet by critics as "una delle più solide pezze d'appoggio tradizionalmente addotte dai biografi a sostegno dell'accusa di eresia e di pertinace irreligiosità" ("Uno 'scandolo'" 23). Orvieto's study disproves Pulci's authorship and redefines the boundaries of the playing field with regards to Pulci's religiosity.

2.5 A Sonnet by Matteo Nerucci

In *Lo studio fiorentino 1473-1503* Armando Verde published a sonnet by Matteo Nerucci discovered in a manuscript from San Gimignano (134-35). The slightly ambiguous sonnet alludes to the fact that Pulci suffered the consequences of a misattribution, while the author reprimands Pulci for his association with Dei. The sonnet is the following:

Luigi, se con tua confusione
el tractato dell'anima t'invesca,
i' ti dirol perché non ti rincresca,
egli è perché tu hai del macharone.

Et per dirti più 'l vero, l'ambitione
del tuo cervello, ch'en basso fiume pesca,
porge alla volontà diabolica esca
della perversa et folle opinione.

L'incorruption dell'anima io confesso,
come tien de' cattolici el senato
et come e' savi antichi hanno concesso,

⁷⁹ See section 2.6.

ma tu che non a Christo ti se' dato,
ma al bestiale Epicuro, et setti messo
nel vivere incivile et scellerato,

sentira' 'l crucciato,
co' tuo conspiratori indocto et parvi,
ne' sempiterni et lacrimabili arvi;

non crediate posarvi,
et hora et poi: vogliono e fati
che tutti siam puniti o premiati.

Alessio Decaria believes that Nerucci's sonnet sustains that beyond Florence Pulci was known as the author of *Costor che fan*, even if in Florence all knew Benedetto Dei as the true author (112-13). Much more intriguing is Alessandro Polcri's comment on the poem relegated to a footnote in his study, but certainly worthy of further consideration:

Le parole rima «pesca» ed «esca» e «t'invesca» sono, senza dubbio, un diretto richiamo a *Costor che fan sì gran disputazione*. Dunque, è certo che il tema sia quello *de anima*, ma non mi pare che il sonetto sia rivolto a Pulci per rimproverarlo di avere scritto il sonetto sulla mortalità dell'anima. Sembra, invece, che Matteo scriva per ammonirlo e anche accusarlo di conoscere gli epicurei, cioè gente che difende una «perversa et folle opinione». Matteo sta qui accusando Luigi di frequentare il Dei (che, infatti, aveva fama di epicureo) e dunque di rischiare di perdersi. Il che deporebbe a favore del fatto che per il Nerucci il Dei era l'autore di *Costor che fan sì gran disputazione*. (59n58)

A closer reading of Nerucci's sonnet supports Polcri's proposal. The first quatrain of the sonnet addresses the situation in which Pulci finds himself. Already from the second line we see an allusion to Pulci being tangled up in the treatise on the soul: "el tractato dell'anima t'invesca." The verb *invescare* means *porre in vischio*; the phrase *circolo vizioso* comes to mind, which is the Italian translation of a catch-22 situation.⁸⁰ Pulci certainly found himself in a sticky situation after helping Dei compose *Costor che fan*.

⁸⁰ See "Invescare" *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani*.

The second quatrain of Nerucci's sonnet explains how Pulci ended up in this situation. Nerucci believes that Dei's potentially inflammatory sonnet was simply an "esca diabolica" irresistible to someone of Pulci's disposition (7). Lines 9-11 support the immortality of the soul; the following tercet scolds Pulci for choosing the wrong path (12-14).

Further supporting the hypothesis proposed by Polcri is the change to the second person plural in the last two tercets: "non crediate posarvi" (18). It is no longer Pulci who is being scolded; it is Pulci along with his "conspiratori" (16), namely Benedetto Dei. However, one may also include Bernardo Bellincioni and other proponents of vernacular literary culture in this group.⁸¹ Line 15 certainly came to fruition as Nerucci tells Pulci: "sentira' il crucciato." Pulci certainly did hear the wrath.

2.6 *Sempre la pulcia muor, signore, a torto*

In the same vein as the exculpatory letter written to Lorenzo in February of 1474 is Pulci's sonnet *Sempre la pulcia muor, signore, a torto*. This sonnet is not as distressed in tone as the February letter written by Pulci's trembling hand. In this sonnet Pulci laments the persistent attacks of those who want him in "prigione o morto":

Sempre la pulcia muor, signore, a torto;
ché, torcendo le dita altri, ella muore.
Però no•mmi riprender con furore,
ch'i so chi•mmi vuol prigione o morto.

S'i' t'ho dato dell'erbe del mio orto,
piglia el dolce, come l'ape il fiore;
o, se vi fusse qualche strano sapore,
e' piacerà a qualcuno ch'ha 'l gusto torto.

⁸¹ For another intriguing poem dealing with the soul by Bellincioni see Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 113-14.

E' ci è tanto romore per un sonetto,
che pare ch'i' abbia morto colla spada
coloro che gridan sol per mio dispetto.

Ché, se si dice sopr'una guaspada
tre volte gniffignerre, o simil detto,
Lucifer vi verrà con sua masnada.

Or pur, se non v'agrada
i mie sonetto, ne faren silenzio:
utt-neque mini, disse Terenzio.⁸²

In many of Franco's sonnets targeting Pulci, he refers to Pulci as a common flea.⁸³ Pulci's cognomen was utilized maliciously by detractors.⁸⁴ The opening lines of *Sempre la pulcia muor* express the unfortunate destiny of the flea; there is no doubt as to whom the lowly insect refers.

In verse five Pulci refers to his previous writings as *erbe*. Pulci states that he previously gave herbs from his garden to his now detractor. This is not the only occasion in which Pulci referred to his sonnets and capacity for the written word as derived from nature. In his *Confessione* Pulci refers to his sonnets similarly:

E la natura par che si diletta
varie cose crear, diversi ingegni:
me dette per dote i miei sonetti. (55-59)

In the last canto of the *Morgante* there is another instance resembling the lines from *Sempre la pulcia muor*.

⁸² Qtd. fr. Orvieto, "Uno 'scandolo' del '400" 30. Orvieto provides different possibilities for the incorrect Latin in the final verse (Orvieto, *Pulci medievale* 214-15).

⁸³ Etymology of Pulci: *pulci* in modern day Italian is the plural form of *pulce*. *Pulce* is derived from the latin *pulicem*, which is the accusative form of *pulex* ("Pulce" *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani*). Orvieto identifies other lines containing similar references by Pulci's detractors in *Pulci Medievale* 214-15: "Lascia ruzzar pur le pulce co' cani" (Son. 53.17); "Non temo morso d'affamata pulce" (Son. 40.13); "Pulci e pulcini di trista razzina" (Son. 21.12).

⁸⁴ Pulci also placed his opponents within the insect realm referring to them as cicadas; see sections 2.10 and 2.17.

Forse coloro ancor che leggeranno,
di questa tanto piccola favilla
la mente con poca esca accenderanno
de' monti o di Parnaso o di Sibilla;
e de' miei fior come ape piglieranno
i dotti, s'alcun dolce ne distilla;
il resto a molti pur darà diletto,
e l'aüttore ancor sia benedetto. (28.141)

The lines from the *Morgante* are even more apparent than the slightly ambiguous lines from *Sempre la pulcia muor*. In this octave Pulci is referring to his attempt to please both lovers of popular poetry and learned men: those who would visit Parnassus or the Sibyl's cave. By Pulci's own admission we know that he frequented the mystical *Grotta della Sibilla*.⁸⁵

In the octave above from *Morgante* XXVIII the verb *pigliare* is used, as seen in *Sempre la pulcia muor*. In this instance "i dotti" is the explicit subject of the verb form "piglieranno" (28.141.5-6); these are undoubtedly the learned elite of which Ficino's circle is comprised. It is one of this same circle that is the subject of "piglia" in *Sempre la pulcia muor* (6).

The penultimate line from *Morgante* XXVIII concludes: also that "il resto," may provide "diletto" to a certain crowd (28.141.7). In contrast to the learned men who utilized Pulci's poetic capacity, so did another author: "l'aüttore ancor sia benedetto." Pulci references Benedetto; as in Benedetto Dei the true author of *Costor che fan*. The last verse of the octave serves a two-fold purpose: it identifies an individual who took delight in the

⁸⁵ Pulci speaks of his trips to the mystical *Grotta della Sibilla* in *Morgante* 26.112. Guglielmo Volpi described Pulci's trip to the enchanted locale: "Da Foligno andò a visitare presso Norcia la famosa grotta della Sibilla. Lassù ai piedi si una rupe, sotto un monte, dalla cui vetta si scorgono i due mari Adriatico e Tirreno, s'apre un antro e dinanzi si stende un laghetto, nelle cui acque misteriose dice la leggenda ch'ebbe tomba Pilato. L'antro si credè abitato da una Sibilla; e a quel luogo orrido, guardato con spavento e fuggito dai montari, che vedevano di là sollevarsi le tempeste, traevano da ogni parte a evocare gli spiriti infernali e a consacrare i loro libri negromanti, fattuchieri e altra simile genia" ("Luigi Pulci" 14 and n4).

poetry that the Academy was not fond of, and addresses the controversial attribution of *Costor che fan*.

When speaking of “erbe” given from his “orto” in *Sempre la pulcia muor*, Pulci is possibly referring to his poetic prowess previously lent to his now detractors. There are many examples of Pulci lending his pen to others. Pulci composed many octaves for his brother Luca’s *Ciriffo Calvaneo*. There is the recently discussed *Costor che fan* written by Dei with Pulci’s help. Pulci guided many of the *brigata*’s improvised poetic contests. Pulci was a great promoter of the *Nenciale* tradition, undoubtedly alongside Lorenzo during composition of the *Nencia da Barberino*.⁸⁶

The proposal that Pulci lent his pen to Ficino’s collaborators prior to the heightening of tensions is a tantalizing one; however, not far-fetched and quite probable. Pulci seemed indiscriminate in lending his pen. During an exchange of sonnets between 1481 and 1484, Tommaso Baldinotti accuses Alessandro Borsi, a disciple of Ficino, of utilizing Pulci’s talents.⁸⁷ A closer examination of Pulci’s literary collaboration may potentially provide various opportunities for fresh analysis of the the Pulci-Ficino polemic.

In line seven of *Sempre la pulcia muor* Pulci further sustains that some of the sonnets he helped compose maintained a “strano sapore.” This strange taste may be a reference to a Neoplatonic philosophy not well understood by Pulci. Pulci did not mind assisting in the composition of these sonnets because they would certainly please people who had a similar “gusto torto.” These verses from *Sempre la pulcia muor* may be mistakenly interpreted as Pulci sarcastically referring to his own writings. However, in an exculpatory sonnet it would

⁸⁶ Pulci also contributed *La Beca da Dicomano* to the *Nenciale* tradition. True to form, Pulci’s *Beca* was a caricature of Lorenzo’s more polished *Nencia*.

⁸⁷ See Badioli and Dami, 123 and n221.

seem rather odd, even with sarcasm's employ, for Pulci to declare his own writings strange and accuse those fond of them as having bad taste.

In the opening lines of *Sempre la pulcia muor* Pulci draws contrast between twisting fingers of his opponents, "torcendo le dita," and the resulting death wished upon him (2). Pulci views the response to his prodding as exaggerated, simply stating that the counterattacks by others are not commensurate. Throughout the polemics with both Franco and Ficino, Pulci maintains that the responses to his writings are too severe.

Line nine of *Sempre la pulcia muor* proves to be quite useful in providing insight into the polemical situation. "E' ci è tanto romore per un sonetto" undoubtedly references a sonnet for which Pulci is being taken to task; one of the "sonetti aiutati fare" referenced in the February 1474 letter. Again the *rumor* caused by the sonnet does not seem commensurate. A chronological reconstruction of Pulci's sonnets provides a likely candidate for the sonnet.

Sempre la pulcia muor is appended to the opening pages of Benedetto Dei's *Cronaca*. Dei was not one to organize his writings without reason. Dei ordered the components of his *Cronaca* either thematically or chronologically.⁸⁸ The sonnet at hand, *Sempre la pulcia muor*, is found sandwiched between two sonnets in Milanese, a dialectal horseplay.

A letter sent to Lorenzo from Pulci on September 22, 1473 contained the two sonnets in Milanese dialect. This fact provides a more accurate chronological indication of the composition of *Sempre la pulcia muor*. The exculpatory sonnet is located amongst the dialectal sonnets because of its chronological significance; its subject matter is anything but a linguistic exercise. Thus, *Sempre la pulcia muor* can be approximated to the early Autumn of 1473. The sonnet referenced in *Sempre la pulcia muor* must precede this date.

⁸⁸ For this chronological identification see Orvieto, *Pulci medievale* 223-24.

Costor che fan was written in response to Ficino's lectures on his *Theologia Platonica*, lectures initiated in early 1474. *Costor che fan* is not the sonnet referenced in *Sempre la pulcia muor*, causing "tanto romore," as it had not yet been written. Pulci wrote another rather blasphemous sonnet—to be addressed shortly—*In principio era buio*. *Sempre la pulcia* is not referring to this sonnet either: Pulci wrote *In principio era buio* in derision of pilgrims headed to Rome for the Jubilee year of 1475, again after 1473. By process of elimination there is one sonnet by Pulci's pen that cannot be ruled out chronologically: *Poich'io partii da voi*. The content certainly is sufficiently blasphemous on the surface.

2.7 *Poich'io partii da voi*: The Bible Rewritten

The sonnet referenced in *Sempre la pulcia muor* would most definitely be the earliest identifiable text contributing to doubt concerning Pulci's orthodoxy. The sonnet was probably the source of the closing lines from the February letter, in which Pulci sarcastically paraphrases those who question his orthodoxy. It is highly probable, by process of chronological elimination, that *Sempre la pulcia muor* refers to *Poich'io partii da voi*.

Poich'io partii da voi, Bartolomeo,
de' vostri buon precetti ammaestrato,
un certo caso strano m'è incontrato
da far meravigliare un gabbadeo:

i' truovo in su n'un libro d'un giudeo,
che Pietro corse sopra il mar ghiacciato,
e ch'egli spuntellò certo un frascato
il mie' Sanson del popol Filisteo;

e Moisè passò con la suo' cesta
dove teneva in collo una pescaia
d'un certo luogo là dove si pesca.

A Faraon fu aperta la callaia,
sicchè, levata la saracinesca,

affogò forse venti, non migliaia.

Dunque la Bibbia abbaia:
Lazzaro, e gli altri risuscitati,
chi ebbri, chi epilenti, e chi alloppiati,

degli infermi sanati.
E' sì dicea così di frà Cristofano
sicche un quartuccio non ritorna il cofano.⁸⁹

The blasphemous potential of the sonnet is evident; at first glance there seems little room for a defense to the contrary. The opening lines identify a third party: Bartolomeo. The hypotheses on this person's identity are simply conjecture.⁹⁰ An identification of Bartolomeo would prove interesting; however, it is not necessary to comprehend the sonnet's aim. Bartolomeo was certainly one of the utmost orthodoxy; the verses that follow Bartolomeo's name contrast his "buon precetti" (2).

After having parted company with Bartolomeo, the first person voice encounters strange writings in the "libro d'un giudeo" (5). Writings so strange they would "far meravigliar" even a "gabbadeo" (4): a bigot or a hypocrite.⁹¹ The narrative voice recites the material found in the text, systematically disproving the miracles of the Bible. According to the sonnet, Peter followed Christ's example not by walking on water, but by walking across a

⁸⁹ Qtd. fr. Orvieto, "Uno 'scandolo' del '400" 30.

⁹⁰ Many believe that Bartolomeo is Bartolomeo dell'Avveduto, a Renaissance *cantastorie* at the service of the printing house in Ripoli: See Decaria *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 109, 129; Volpi "Luigi Pulci" 36; Warburg 449n215. Orvieto contests this theory ("Uno 'scandolo' del '400" 27-28). Orvieto explains that Bartolomeo dell'Avveduto has never been known to enter in polemics of any kind and was never nominated as an acquaintance in any of Pulci's or his friends' writings. However, Orvieto proposes that the name Bartolomeo was used to substitute the name Benedetto in reference to Dei. His argument is unconvincing; however, Dei would have probably been in full agreement with the deemphasis of the Biblical miracles found in the "libro d'un giudeo."

⁹¹ For the etymology of *gabbadeo* see Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 84n2. Orvieto provides synonyms for gabbadei: "ipocriti" and "bacchettoni" (*Opere minori* 198n2). See also "Gabbadeo" *Accademia della Crusca. Lessicografia della Crusca in rete*.

frozen sea (6). Samson did not destroy the temple of Dagon by pulling the pillars; to the contrary, he furtively tugged a branch of their make-shift “frascato” (7-8).

In verses nine through fourteen the stories of Moses are parodied. Baby Moses did not endure the rapids of the Nile; instead, his raft rested on a hidden rock embankment frequented by fishermen (9-11). The parting of the Red Sea for Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt actually occurred where a canal existed. After Moses passed through this canal, he raised the “saracinesca,” or portcullis, allowing a torrent to drown twenty or so of the Pharaoh’s men, not thousands (12-14).

Line 15, again paraphrasing the “libro d’un giudeo,” leaves little doubt as to the author of that book’s opinion: the Bible barks. The sonnet’s conclusion affirms that the Raising of Lazarus and others was not a miraculous revival of the dead, but the sobering up of those dozing from the influence of drink or opium (16-18). The closing lines question Jesus’s ability to fill a “cofano” with just a “quartuccio,” explicitly questioning the Feeding of the Multitude (20). This sonnet had the most potential for controversy of all the sonnets attributed to Luigi Pulci.

Upon the completion of Dei’s *Costor che fan*, Pulci’s writings concentrate specifically on *spigolistri*: those who pretend to be faithful without truly believing.⁹² If *Poich’io partii da voi* were to be included chronologically with the *spigolistri* sonnets, it would seem to stray considerably off topic. A chronological process of elimination and consideration of subject matter lead to the identification of this sonnet as the one nominated by Pulci as problematic in *Sempre la pulcia muor*. However, a closer examination of the

⁹² The entry for “Spigolista” in *Accademia della Crusca. Lessicografia della Crusca in rete* reads: “Che ha dell’ipocrito, detto così dal farsi veder troppo spesso, appiccare i moccoli accesi agli spigoli degli altari. Lat. *hypocrite*.” Boccaccio uses the word in *Dec* 5.10.56: “una vecchia picchiapetto spigolista . . .” (Branca 703 and n7).

content provides further insight into what may have been the real controversy surrounding *Poich'io partii da voi*.

2.8 The *Testimonium Flavianum*

What was it about Pulci's sonnet that especially irritated clerics and philosophers? Pulci was methodical in his writings, showing the utmost attention in choosing his subject-matter. The opening lines of *Poich'io partii* refer to the "libro d'un giudeo." The Jewish author referenced is Titus Flavius Josephus, a popular first-century Roman-Jewish historian.⁹³ Josephus was well known for his *Testimonium Flavianum* found in the *Antiquitates Judaicae*: an early account of Jesus Christ from a firsthand source. The authenticity of this passage is disputed: many believed in the fifteenth century, and continue to believe today, that the passage was written much later.

The Josephus text was widespread and very popular in the fifteenth century.⁹⁴ Ficino and others cited Josephus's account of Jesus in his *De Christiana religione* to prove Christ's divinity.⁹⁵ While credited as an early historical account of Jesus Christ, Josephus's passage is also well known for its de-emphasis of Biblical miracles.⁹⁶ In *Poich'io partii da voi* Pulci was quick to point out the text's skepticism.

⁹³ Volpi first identifies Josephus as *Giuseppe Ebreo* in "Luigi Pulci. Studio Biografico" 36. See also Polcri 63 and n68.

⁹⁴ In 1444 Gian Francesco Gonzaga wrote a letter to Duke Guarino expressing interest in obtaining the Josephus text. This proves it to be one of the earliest Greek texts sought by Italian humanists from the Byzantine empire (Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy* 75).

⁹⁵ See Zanzarri, *De Christiana religione*: "Conferma delle nostre credenze in base a quelle giudaiche, contro i guidei, riguardo ai Libri Sacri" 175-80. All references to Ficino's *De Christiana religione* are from Zanzarri's edition. Ficino's text is essential to this study and will be increasingly utilized in the following chapter on the Astarotte episode.

⁹⁶ For a bibliography of critical studies examining skepticism found in the Josephus text see Feldman, "Josephus and Modern Scholarship" 477-80.

Pulci brilliantly plays with the opening lines of the sonnet employing a double meaning to the words “far meravigliar un gabbadeo” (4). Initially the reader understands that the book’s contents would shock even a “gabbadeo”: the content being so irreverent that not even a religious hypocrite could stomach it. After reading the sonnet and understanding the Josephus reference, it is understood that the material being paraphrased fascinates, not shocks, religious hypocrites.

Poich’io partii da voi is a sonnet aimed at discrediting or poking fun at the Josephus text thoroughly utilized by many, including Ficino. In this sonnet Pulci highlights a less than principled operation of citation. This undoubtedly infuriated those who valued and cited the Josephus text as proof of the existence of a historical Christ. This sonnet more than annoyed those holding the Josephus text in high regard. They ignored the true and effective aim of the sonnet and instead lamented Pulci’s sonnet as heretical.

2.9 *In principio era buio*: Against Religious Hypocrites

Pulci undoubtedly caused a stir in Florence with the sonnet *In principio era buio e buio fia*.⁹⁷ The sonnet questions the devotion and real motivation of the pilgrims passing through Florence on their way to Rome for the Jubilee of 1475. Pulci’s firsthand account in the sonnet can be dated to just before Jubilee festivities and certainly after all other sonnets and correspondences addressed thus far.

The sonnet’s subject is one of Pulci’s favorites: *spigolistri*. Alessio Decaria dedicates a stimulating chapter to Pulci’s attacks against *spigolistri* in *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di*

⁹⁷ I am thoroughly indebted to Romei, *Analasi del sonetto «In principio era buio, e buio fia» di Luigi Pulci*. This website compiles relevant commentaries, editions, and readings of the sonnet.

Matteo Castellani.⁹⁸ Decaria identifies a previously unknown sonnet by Pulci, *Questi che vanno tanto a San Francesco*, as a general criticism against “gabbanti o spigolistri o spigolista” (line 2).⁹⁹

Writing against religious hypocrites was by no means a novel tradition. Decaria states: “*Questi che vanno tanto a San Francesco*, insomma, è un sonetto che non si distacca troppo da una generica polemica, ben radicata nel Medioevo e molto ben rappresentata nella letteratura comica italiana dei primi secoli, contro gli spigolistri” (98). One may locate *In principio era buio* with this same tradition finding not so distant roots in the poetic works of Dante, Antonio Pucci, and Burchiello’s *poetica del barbiere*.¹⁰⁰ While composing *In principio era buio* Pulci undoubtedly held close Dante’s comparison of the throngs of sinners in the *Malebolge* to the masses of pilgrims moving across the Ponte degli Angeli in Rome during the Jubilee of 1300 (*Inf.* 18.28-33).¹⁰¹

The sonnet published by Decaria falls in line with Pulci’s other writings and provides more evidence to Pulci’s personal disdain for *spigolistri*. Pulci attacks the false devotion of the “romei” in sonnet CXLIV:

⁹⁸ See Decaria, ch. “Un sonneto inedito di Luigi Pulci contro gli spigolistri” in *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 81-138.

⁹⁹ The sonnet is the following: “Questi che vanno tanto a San Francesco, / gabbanti o spigalistri o spigolista, / sanno Quel che l’anime ministra / le vede insino nel nocciolo del pesco; // et corrono col peccato così fresco / al frate: che l’amico, che rigistra, / no-l metta nella filza o nella listra / ché stanno col diavolo in cagnesco! // Et credon tuttavia che ne gli porti, / cuopronsi col becchetto et chi col velo / et van col capo basso e’ colli torti; // ché si vergognon di guardare il Cielo, / sappiendo che gli àn fatti mille torti, / et sai che questo male ne va col pelo. // Perché e’ non sentin gelo, / co’ mocolini pillotano i piè a’ santi / veggendogli ire scalzi, i miei gabbanti. // Io ce ne vego tanti / et più cie ne sare’ / per ognun venti, / se non che fra Liseo gli à molto spenti” (Qtd. fr. Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 81-82).

¹⁰⁰ See Decaria, *Pulci ritrovato* 262-63.

¹⁰¹ In Ronald Martinez’s notes to Durling’s translated edition of *Inferno*, Martinez states: “there is a special irony in the parallel between Hell and the Rome of the Jubilee.” Martinez also states: “his emphasis on ocular testimony is evidence of his having seen it himself” (283). It is interesting to note that Dante witnessed this event in person. This is similar to Pulci’s firsthand account in *In principio era buio*. For more on Dante’s Jubilee see Vazzana, “Il giubileo del 1300 nel poema dantesco.”

In principio era buio, e buio fia.
Hai tu veduto, Benedetto Dei,
come sel becon questi gabbadei,
che dicon ginocchion l'avemaria!

Tu riderai in capo della via,
ché tu vedrai le squadre de' romei
levarsi le gallozze e gli agnusdei
e tornare a cercar dell'osteria.

Ma il piacer fie di queste capperucce,
e di certe altre avemarie infilate,
che biascion tutto di come bertucce.

O pecorelle mie, zoppe e sciancate,
che credete lassù salire a grucce,
e nespole parer poi 'ncoronate,

le porte fien serrate,
e tutte al buio indietro torneranno,
e in bocca al drago tuo si troveranno.

E fia ben male il danno
ma, a mie parere, ancor peggio le beffe.
Thaibo, accia, accia, e nasserì bizeffe.¹⁰²

The religious parody is limited to the first line as the sonnet corrupts the beginning of Genesis: “Nel principio Dio creò i cieli e la terra” (Gen. 1.1).¹⁰³ The second verse recalls Benedetto Dei’s sonnet *Costor che fan*: “You saw it yourself Benedetto Dei.” Pulci continues with Dei’s discourse from the controversial sonnet; however, he does not address the immortality of the soul.

Instead, Pulci concentrates on the discourse presented in the final lines of *Costor che fan* (15-23): those who hope to achieve a place in an afterlife full of “beccafichi e gli ortolan pelati / e buon vin dolci e letti sprimacciati” (20-21). Interestingly, Pulci does not refute the after-life as did Dei (22). *In principio era buio* asserts that the pilgrims are crippled, lame

¹⁰² Qtd. fr. Orvieto, *Opere minori* 199-200.

¹⁰³ All Biblical quotations in Italian are from *La Sacra Bibbia: Nuova Riveduta*.

sheep who hope to ascend to a bountiful afterlife using crutches; however, the gates to paradise will certainly be closed to them (13-16).

The opening of the second quatrain again addresses Benedetto Dei in the second person singular. Pulci tells Dei: “you would laugh seeing the squads of pilgrims” who as soon as they relieve themselves of the necessary prayers look for the closest “osteria” (8). Pulci’s lyrical talent is uncontested as he compares the pilgrims to “bertucce” or monkeys (11). The monkey was representative of the act of imitation.¹⁰⁴ These monkeys “biascion” their prayers: coming from the verb *biasciare* which means to chew without teeth.¹⁰⁵ The image produced is the recitation of empty prayers carrying no more weight than their superficial verbal worth. Pulci effortlessly transforms the abstract question of false faith to concrete actions and images.

The tercet concluding this sonnet poses difficulty for analysis. Pulci sustains that the damage caused by their false faith is only surpassed by the shame found in their act of mockery (18-19). In the last verse, the sonnet recites words considered in a 1759 commentary to be “moresche.”¹⁰⁶ These words translate to something of an Arabic tinged gibberish, comparing the pilgrims’ deplorable actions to those of Muslims.

The uproar caused by this sonnet was due to the opening verse, which stands in stark contrast to Biblical verse, stating that in the beginning there was only darkness. As the sonnet

¹⁰⁴ In the *Morgante* there is also a *bertuccia*. The act of imitation of the *bertuccia* found in the *Morgante* leads to Margutte’s death. A *bertuccia* steals Margutte’s boots and tries to put them on; Margutte is overcome by laughter and dies (*Morgante* 19.149). For a stimulating article on the episode see Martinelli, *Gli stivali di Margutte*.

¹⁰⁵ See “Biasciare” *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani*.

¹⁰⁶ Paolo Orvieto cites the eighteenth-century commentary in his notes to the sonnet: “Thaibo, accia, accia: accolgo la lezione dell’edizione dei sonetti del 1759 (a cura di F. De’ Rossi), sistematicamente respinta perché apparentemente non dà senso; si tratta, con ogni probabilità, di parole «moresche» (come del resto anche «nasserì bizeffe»)” (*Opere minori* 199).

proceeds, the rest is seemingly uncontroversial. In comparison to the previously analyzed *Poich'io partii da voi* this sonnet is rather tame; however, by Pulci's own account we know that the sonnet was definitely used as ammunition by his enemies.

By this point Pulci had many enemies waiting for a reason to pounce; the opening verse of this sonnet was more than sufficient. His typical cast of enemies immediately cried foul to indicate his blasphemous ways. The wrath must have been fierce as Pulci addresses the reaction to this sonnet in *Morgante* XXVIII:

Sempre i giusti son primi i lacerati:
io non vo' ragionar più della fede,
ch'io me ne vo poi in bocca a questi frati
dove vanno anche spesso le lamprede,
e certi scioperon pinzocorati
rapportano: – Il tal disse, il tal non crede –,
dove tanto romor par che ci sia
se «in principio era buio e buio fia». (42)

The explanation provided in the *Morgante* does not utilize the veiled allegory found elsewhere in the final five cantos of the *Morgante*. Pulci's message is clear in these lines. Pulci surrenders; he says that he will not “ragionar più della fede.” It is something that has brought only trouble his way as “scioperon pinzocorati” sustain: “Look, there goes a man who talks without believing” (28.42.6).¹⁰⁷

In the penultimate line from the same octave, once again, Pulci thinks that his sonnet received unfair criticism and caused too much unwarranted “romor” (28.42.7). It is evident which sonnet Pulci is referring to, Pulci simply puts the controversial title of the sonnet in the last verse of the octave. He immediately sets the record straight in the subsequent octave, rewriting the opening line of the controversial sonnet in accordance to the opening lines from Genesis 1.1:

¹⁰⁷ This English translation of *Morgante* 28.43.6 is qtd. fr. Tusciani's invaluable translated edition of the *Morgante*.

In principio creò la terra e il cielo
Colui che tutto fe' qual sapiente,
e le tenebre al sol facevon velo. (28.43.1-3)

The line rewritten in octave 43 was obviously one of the main rallying points behind the calls of heresy leveled at Pulci.

A veiled identification of Pulci's detractors is present in Canto XXVIII: "basta che tutto giudica la Mente" (43.6). Those who judged Pulci were not of God, but rather of the Mind, with a capital *M*. This is undoubtedly a reference to the Neoplatonists' anthropocentric philosophy.

2.10 *Contra mendaces et impios detractores*: Ficino's First Jabs

Marsilio Ficino officially entered into a defined polemic with Pulci per letters sent to Bernardo Pulci and Bernardo Rucellai. Why after remaining neutral during Pulci's dispute with Franco would Ficino suddenly attack Pulci? While Lorenzo drew nearer to Ficino's cultural program, Ficino elevated his purpose to the divine. At the end of 1473 Ficino took religious vows, becoming a priest. As already demonstrated, there were many factors in the tension between Pulci and Ficino. In addition to the Franco-Ficino friendship, Pulci's ridicule of the Josephus text, and Pulci's confrontational comportment, Ficino's new position as priest became just one more contributing factor to the polemic.

By taking religious orders, Ficino sought to establish himself in the ecclesiastical sphere as a defender and promoter of religion. In a letter declaring his dedication of the *De Christiana religione* Ficino announces his accomplishment in finishing the treatise: "el tuo Marsilio Ficino . . . ha in questo anno composto coll'aiuto divino un libro in confirmatione et

difensione della vera religione, quale è la cristiana.”¹⁰⁸ In elevating his purpose to the divine, Ficino fostered his own philosophical-religious program as Pulci and his writings became the polar opposite. Pulci became the attacker and suppresser of religion, inviting Ficino’s condemnation.

There are no sonnets by Ficino’s pen relevant to his polemic with Pulci. Ficino chose a medium much more to his liking: the Latin missive.¹⁰⁹ Ficino addresses the first of two letters explicitly taking Luigi to task to none other than Luigi’s brother Bernardo. Ficino probably composed this letter at the end of 1474 or beginning of 1475, shortly after Luigi’s sonnet *In principio era buio*. The letter is the following:

Against liars and impious slanderers

Marsilio Ficino to Bernardo Pulci: greetings

You say that your brother is a great disgrace to you because everyone regards him as deceitful and unreliable. I cannot deny that a man is a liar who exercises a venomous tongue and pen irreverently and insolently against the divine majesty, which is truth itself. Men assert nothing more truly of him therefore than that he is a liar. But why do I not find him unreliable? Because he is so persistently reliable in his ways that he has already grown old in his unreliability and spite.

Correct your brother’s faults if you can, although to cure so longstanding a disease is very difficult, and to correct so abominable a vice perhaps impossible; for that angel who is said to have fallen for rebelling only once against God never rose again. If you cannot correct them, at least bear those faults patiently; for God tolerates his insults, perhaps because He knows that the man does not understand what he is talking about.

Your brother’s vices do not hide your virtues, Bernardo, but highlight them: for your whiteness shines more brightly beside his blackness. Do not therefore be less constant yourself in good conduct than your brother is in bad, so that you may do good as successfully as he does ill. (1: 168-69)

¹⁰⁸ Qtd. fr. Tantarli 190.

¹⁰⁹ All quotations of Ficino’s letters in English are from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* vols. 1-4. Ficino’s letters, including those lamenting Pulci’s bellicose rhetoric, are made even more accessible to scholarly analysis by these translated editions.

The initial lines suggest that Bernardo, known mostly for his religious writings, spoke out against Luigi.¹¹⁰ Although a document in which Bernardo laments his brother has yet to be discovered, Bernardo was always on the lookout for Luigi's good standing in Florentine society. On October 27, 1473 Bernardo wrote to Lorenzo asking Lorenzo to convince Luigi to take a wife: "Et per esser breve, Luigi mio fratello viene costì, et io mi ricordo che altra volta apersi con voi il mio desiderio che lui pigliassi donna, et domandai da voi aiuto di dispollo a tale impresa."¹¹¹

In *Lo Studio fiorentino* Armando Verde suggests that Ficino's letter was addressed to Bernardo as a strategically calculated move: "erano insolenze che Marsilio non omise neppure nella lettera ammonitrice scritta a Bernardo Pulci nel chiaro intento di forzare la polemica ricattando la famiglia, così economicamente bisognosa" (132). The intent of Ficino in the content and recipient of the letter was certainly calculated, as noted by Polcri in *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera*: "Certo il risultato è molto efficace: pubblicare una lettera inviata a Bernardo disperato permette al Ficino di lavorare surrettiziamente sulle differenze tra i due fratelli evidenziando la purezza di Bernardo e, dunque, meglio mostrando la bestialità di Luigi" (41).

Bernardo Pulci was known for his religious poetry and drama. In "Raging Against Priests in Italian Renaissance Verse" Lauro Martines underscores Bernardo Pulci's strong anticlericalism for someone with an unquestionable orthodoxy (271). Martines writes: "After a trip in 1474 to the Rome of Pope Sixtus IV, the pious Bernardo Pulci produced two sonnets denouncing the corruption of the Curia, a lascivious and greedy daughter ("figlia scelerata e

¹¹⁰ For more information on Bernardo Pulci, see Flamini, *La vita e le liriche di Bernardo Pulci*; Carrai, "Lorenzo e l'umanesimo volgare dei fratelli Pulci" in *Lorenzo de' Medici: New Perspectives*; and Martines, who identifies a strong anticlericalism in Bernardo Pulci, 271-73.

¹¹¹ Qtd. fr. Bongi 23-24.

ingorda”). He calls on Jesus to save the church, metaphorized as a ship loaded with vice in dangerous seas” (272).

By denigrating Luigi through a letter to Bernardo, Ficino is further contesting Pulci’s previous and future exculpatory claims of writing against religious hypocrites. The fact that Bernardo is a pious man known for his anticlerical sentiment is just as important as Bernardo and Luigi’s fraternal bond. Ficino laments Luigi’s actions to someone who is anticlerical and has used religious parody, while Luigi claims his writings are analogous. Thus Ficino can claim to have no problem with anticlerical sentiment. The letter is doubly damaging as Pulci is attacked and his possible claims at self-defense foiled.

Ficino addresses yet another epistolary attack on Luigi to Bernardo Rucellai. Bernardo Rucellai was a friend of Pulci’s, who later became an enthusiastic proponent of the Neoplatonic Academy.¹¹² Ficino writes:

Against liars and impious slanderers
Marsilio Ficino to the distinguished Bernardo Rucellai: greetings.
Do not be disturbed Bernardo, if giant Pulci snarls ferociously at everybody.¹¹³ A dog barks because of his nature and habit, and a quarrelsome fellow like this only ceases to bark when he ceases to live unless, perhaps, he joins Cerberus in barking even after he is dead!

But tell me, Bernardo, how can his barking harm anyone? It even makes people more watchful and cautious; and since it is common knowledge that he always abuses the upright either from envy or dissimilarity, the man will be thought most upright whom Pulci has most abused. I would certainly rather be censured by the words of an unjust man than by the facts themselves; but an unjust man in fact censures anyone he praises in words, for such a man is taken to be his friend and like him.

Every man who disparages others, necessarily disparages himself first, for he is guilty of envy and slander. So far does a man degrade the tongue who uses it for evil purposes! Evil speakers may defile their mouths with curses, but we may not defile ours. If we detest bad smells, we should know that

¹¹² For more information on Bernardo Rucellai see Comanducci, “Bernardo Rucellai e l’«Accademia neoplatonica» di Careggi.”

¹¹³ The translated edition uses Pulci’s name here. The original letter says “adversus omnes” (Qtd. fr. Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 218).

nothing smells worse than a bad mouth, and that it is more important to remove dirt from our mouths than from our clothes; foul talk is a sign of a corrupt mind. Therefore we must take great care lest we are infected by evil example. We should not care what the small-minded say of us but what men say, and less about that than what truth itself says. If something false is thrown at you, despise it, have confidence in the truth; but if it is true, turn the abuses of your enemy to your improvement. Do not turn to the idle breath of common gossip whether favourable or unfavourable. The divine soul should depend on nothing except God.

Now you are striving in vain to correct that lost soul, the giant Pulci, for the madman neither hears nor listens to reason. That wicked man will never spare good men, for he has never respected God. How can a madman, who hates God, love men who are the images of God? You ask me to correct him with whatever principles I can. You ask me to plough the sea shore. No one attacks divine matters more aggressively nor more foolishly than the little man you ask me to correct. That Thersites should be punished rather than corrected. What an abomination, that he should with impunity disgorge such invective from his venomous mouth against God! And what a mouth is this? One that was created by God for God's praise.

I need not accuse our present generation of anything, Bernardo, except that it has produced this small but evil portent. It is said that in ancient times a presumptuous war was declared by the Giants against Jupiter, but in these times a pathetic war has been declared by dwarves against the most high God.

You commend the wretched monster to my discipline. Assuredly, if he had had a brain as well as energy he would have been utterly poisonous to the human race. Hercules might have overlooked this man from contempt. Marsilio rejects him because he stinks.

Farewell and next time ask for something easier. (1: 169-70)

The letter opens by alluding to Pulci's natural inclination to barking. Ficino's attack on Pulci in this letter intensifies when compared to the letter sent to Bernardo Pulci. The first letter underscored Luigi's distorted nature with even his own brother appalled by his behavior. Luigi's behavior appears once again exaggerated with one of his friends appearing to ask Ficino for intervention. Ficino succeeded in depicting Luigi as a truly troubled soul for whom his family and friends are concerned. Ficino used these letters in concert to further push Pulci, already under attack by detractors, to the margins of Medicean culture in the name of religion.

The penultimate paragraph, in which Ficino addresses “our present generation,” demonstrates that intellectuals of the time were quite aware of the changing cultural climate. Ficino and company were obviously opposed to a sub-section of the present generation permeated by popular medieval literary traditions full of parody, reminiscent of Boccaccio. Luigi Pulci was a product of this culture, as were many others who lacked a formal humanist education.

While Pulci is the primary target, it is obvious that Ficino also took aim at the culture that Pulci represented. Ficino aimed not only to establish his brand of Neoplatonism, but also to guide Lorenzo’s cultural interests away from Pulci and his frivolous cultural agenda. Ficino’s intention is evident in his letter to Lorenzo on September 9, 1474.

In this letter to Lorenzo, Ficino lectures on wasted time. Ficino’s motivation comes about following an illness, which also led to his religious conversion. The letter is aptly entitled *Tempus parce expendum*. The most significant lines from that letter are the following:

During my infirmity, Lorenzo, nothing afflicted my mind so bitterly as the memory of time ill-spent. . . . For the rest, the absurdity of fleeting trifles does not satisfy the immortal mind, which by natural inclination demands the eternal and immeasurable. I beseech you therefore, dearest patron, through eternal God, to spend the most precious moment of time, short as it is, cautiously and wisely, lest you ever have cause to repent in vain your prodigality and irreparable waste. . . .

I beg you, set against foolish cares, empty pastimes, and unnecessary activity. . . . Moreover indulge in games and jests seldom and sparingly, for God has appointed you to a greater role. . . .

But I wish to impress on this letter this seal: you should neither listen to flatterers, nor hearken to those disparagers with whom each great house abounds. The former try to tear out the eyes of your mind, and the latter to cut off your hands, that is your friends. The lie, God himself will at length destroy; but the truth He will guard. Trust in God alone, Lorenzo: I also trust in God.

Once more, farewell today! (1: 130-31)

The letter is conducive to a contextualization within the changing cultural climate. “Empty pastimes” undoubtedly refer to those of the *brigata* in which Pulci’s role was foremost. Ficino obviously has Luigi Pulci in mind when addressing “flatterers” and “disparagers,” echoing the label of Pulci as a disparager in Ficino’s letter to Bernardo Ruccellai.¹¹⁴

Lorenzo responds by confirming his adherence to Ficino’s proposal in a letter entitled *Responsio ad epistolam de tempore parce expendendo*. The following letter, along with the completion of the *De summo bono*, signifies Lorenzo’s declaration of inferiority of Pulci’s cultural agenda in the face of Ficino’s Neoplatonism. Lorenzo’s response to Ficino is the following:

Perhaps this is because you are first in love and far exceed all others in friendship to me; perhaps it is because you are able to bestow abundantly those gifts of friendship which others cannot. For others who attend us with their kindness can bestow riches, honours, or pleasure. But those gifts are all in fortune’s hand, so that we have nothing surer than their uncertainty nor more reliable than their inconstancy. . . .

By this danger I have been reminded that I should more freely and more often make use of you; and since our human condition is such that it is more effectively influenced by example than by reason I mean thus to profit more from both you and time; from time because it has no tomorrow, from you because you are a man for whom no moment is free from the dread of death. Farewell and take care of your health. (1: 133-34)

In the letter to Bernardo Pulci, Ficino states that Luigi is actually quite reliable: reliable in his unreliability. In Lorenzo’s response to Ficino he reiterates the lines about reliability. The phrase addressing material gifts: “nothing surer than their uncertainty nor more reliable than their inconstancy” seems to recall Ficino’s letter to Bernardo Pulci. Lorenzo’s reference is slightly veiled; however, it may be seen as a statement on the fleeting value of the literature and culture represented by Pulci.

¹¹⁴ In the indispensable *Storia dell’accademia platonica di Firenze* Arnaldo Della Torre states: “E trattandosi del Ficino, non sappiamo davvero a qual mai altro *detractor* pensare, se non a Luigi Pulci” (827).

In *Pulci medievale* Orvieto addresses this cultural turning point:

Il 1473-74 rappresenta un ben preciso biennio discriminante per il mondo culturale e letterario fiorentino: Lorenzo ventiquattrenne passa dall'ambiente letterario della «brigata» all'impegno culturale e filosofico dell'Accademia. È costretto ad una scelta: o il Ficino o il Pulci; sarà preferito il Ficino e di conseguenza anche Firenze sarà sottoposta ad una radicale operazione moralizzatrice, sotto la personale direzione di Lorenzo. (237)

Pulci's jocular brand of literature, his friendship with Lorenzo, and diplomatic service continued; however, there is no doubt that at this point Lorenzo viewed Ficino's cultural worth as greater than Pulci's. The cultural transition is complete at this point, and Pulci assumes a secondary role. The importance of the humanist philosopher-cleric surpassed the material value of the medieval poet-jester.

2.11 *Se Dio ti guardi, brutto ceffolino*: Pulci Counters

After the letters by Ficino, Pulci countered with direct attacks on Marsilio Ficino. In Pulci's poetic production there are at least four sonnets identified as specifically attacking Marsilio Ficino. Armando Verde dates the following sonnets to 1475-76 (247). These sonnets may be viewed as the culmination of the tension percolating throughout 1473 and 1474.

In "Luigi Pulci and Humanism in Florence" Edoardo Lèbano explains the tension between Pulci and Ficino:

The *causa prima* for Pulci's attack on the Tuscan philosopher is to be found in the poet's native intolerance of intellectual speculation and in his constant contempt for religion. . . . Pulci's intolerance of philosophical and theological discussion—in which, because of his poor cultural preparation, he could not have participated even if he so desired—was perhaps aggravated by the fact that the neo-Platonic doctrines debated at the Accademia had their principal exponent and supporter in Marsilio Ficino, the same man who, besides competing with Pulci to gain favors of the powerful Medici, had also recently sided against the poet in the latter's dispute with Matteo Franco. (493)

Lèbano seems rather pointed in his statement; however, the model he provides is accurate and requires a minimal amount of fine tuning.¹¹⁵ Pulci did not hold religion in contempt; just the innovative form proposed by Ficino: a hybrid Platonic Christianity.

For Pulci, Marsilio Ficino represented a religious innovation that Pulci equated to that of the *spigolistri*. Even if the tension between the two was tolerable to a Pulci accustomed to life in the culturally varied Medici circles, Ficino's growing popularity in the eyes of Lorenzo must have spawned a certain amount of jealousy in Pulci. At this point the tension between Pulci and Ficino must have been taut; it only took the provocation of Ficino's letters to ignite Pulci.

The first published edition of the sonnets in which Pulci explicitly attacks Ficino was censored. The editor was a friend of both Franco and Ficino and censored Pulci's sonnets to protect the identities of parties involved.¹¹⁶ Ficino's name was transformed to lowly monikers to maintain the sonnet's function. References to *filosofia* or *filosofo* were also changed to *geometria* or *geometro*. The first sonnet aimed at Ficino in the *Libro dei sonetti* is XCVI:

Se Dio ti guardi, *brutto ceffolino*,
Dal cader d'un guancial, ma non d'un tetto,
Dimmi s' avessi gusto a un sonetto?
Ben fai che sì; or' apri quel bocchino.

Tu aresti giurato l' ermellino
Uscirtene così pulito e netto,
Mai cola, ribaldo t' imprometto
Cerbera tu, tu venenoso, e chino.

¹¹⁵ All of Lèbano's works view the question of Pulci's orthodoxy traditionally: that is, unbending in the view that Pulci was a heretic.

¹¹⁶ The sonnets by Pulci directed at Ficino, just as the previous sonnets from the Franco-Pulci clash, are taken from Dolci, *Libro dei sonetti* unless otherwise noted. For more on the censorship of the sonnets see Lèbano, "Luigi Pulci and Fifteenth-Century Humanism in Florence" 494n16. Words in the sonnets that have been identified as modified by critics are italicized.

Bestia fuggito qua dalle maremme
Non ti vergogni vil traditor vecchio
Usurpar l'altrui gloria, e l'altrui gemme?

E le virtù d'un sol, ch' è al mondo specchio
Ingrato più che a Dio Jerusalemme
Al buon Pastor d' un sol monte Livecchio.

Or sturati l'orecchio,
Che tu se' pur lo Dio delle cicale
E di, che per dolor n'avesti male.

Alzate l'orinale
Che questa monacuccia sie 'nfreddata:
Io t'ho a spazzare un dì colla granata.

From the first line there is no doubt who the subject of the sonnet is. "If you view yourself as God" undoubtedly refers to the self-image, according to Pulci, that Ficino maintains.¹¹⁷ "Brutto ceffolino" is a case of censorship as it was originally an explicit nomination of Marsilio Ficino (1). Pulci asks Ficino if he would like to hear a sonnet, and as one would speak to a child, he asks him to open up his "bocchino"; here it comes (4). Whether Ficino likes it or not, he will be force fed this sonnet.

Verse eight of the sonnet begins "Cerbero tu." This references the lines from Ficino's letter to Bernardo Rucellai in which Ficino states: "Tunc latrare desinet eius modi rabula, cum destinet vivere, nisi forte etiam post mortem latratu Cerberum comitetur."¹¹⁸ Cerberus here is in stark contrast to the figure of God that, according to Pulci, Ficino believes himself

¹¹⁷ Decaria identifies this opening verse as an "archetipo burchiellesco" (*Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 216).

¹¹⁸ The Latin versions of the letters to Bernardo Pulci and Bernardo Rucellai are qtd. fr. Polcri 41-43. Other references in this section to Ficino's letters in Latin are also qtd. fr. Polcri.

to be. Cerberus, originally found in the *Aeneid*, is found in Dante's sixth canto of *Inferno*.¹¹⁹ The Sibyl, Aeneas' guide, silences Cerberus with a spiked-cake in the *Aeneid*. Virgil, Dante the pilgrim's guide, feeds Cerberus a mud pie.¹²⁰ Pulci plans on silencing Ficino in lines 3-4, not with a mud pie, but a sonnet.

Verse eight continues: "tu venenoso." There are two instances from Ficino's letters categorizing Pulci with the same adjective. In the letter to Bernardo Pulci, Ficino states that Luigi attacks divine majesty with a "venenosam linguam." In the letter to Rucellai, Ficino echoes the same words: "Impune invectivas multas ore venenoso evomuit contra Deum." Pulci's back to back use of the emphatic second-person pronoun has a strong effect and indicates that this verse is in fact a rebuttal to the insults leveled at Pulci in Ficino's previous letters.

Equally telling are Ficino's lines in the letter to Rucellai: "Nemo infestius, nemo rursus ineptius contra res divinas invehitur quam iste homuncio quem emendare me rogas; puniendus Tersites iste quam castigandus." The use of "homuncio" is one of many physically demeaning insults exchanged during the polemics. It is reinforced by Ficino's comparison of Pulci to the despicable Thersites from Homer's *Iliad*.¹²¹ Thersites is described in the *Iliad* as the following:

The most obnoxious rogue who went to Troy,

¹¹⁹ For Virgil's Cerberus episode see *Aen.* 6.417-22. Pulci was thoroughly familiar with Dante's works as references permeate the *Morgante*. According to Pulci, Ficino occupies himself with the human soul just as Cerberus torments them in *Inferno*: "de lo demonio Cerbero, che 'ntrona / l'anime sì che'esser vorrebbero sorde" (*Inf.* 6.32-33).

¹²⁰ The verses from *Inf.* 6.25-27 are the following: "E 'l duca mio distese le sue spanne, / prese la terra, e con piene le pugna / la gittò dentro a le bramose canne" (*Inf.* 6.25-27).

¹²¹ Thersites is also found in Plato's *Gorgias*. Ficino states that Thersites, representative of Pulci, should be punished rather than corrected. This indicates to the reader that he is referring to Homer's version and not Plato's, as Plato's Thersites was to be corrected.

Bow-legged, with one limping leg, and shoulders
Rounded above his chest, ha had a skull
Quite conical, and mangy fuzz like mould.¹²² (2.216-19)

Thersites is depicted as the anti-hero in every sense, even physically.¹²³ The positioning of his shoulders “rounded above his chest” have contributed to an image of *Thersites* as hunched over. Ficino’s comparison of Pulci to Thersites is two-fold: a physically deformed hunchback, and also one whose “capo chino” is an indication of humility or shame.¹²⁴ Pulci further refutes this description in the final words of verse 8 from his first sonnet against Ficino telling him that he is in fact “chino.” The identification of Pulci’s response and rebuttal to Ficino’s letters to Bernardo Pulci and Rucellai provides a crucial chronological indication: Ficino was the initial aggressor as far as explicit, open hostilities go.

In *Se Dio ti guardi* Pulci further references Ficino as “bestia” and “vil traditor” in lines 9-10. Eventually Pulci does concede the title of God to Ficino: “Dio delle cicale” (16). Pulci often referred to the members of the Academy as *cicale* or cicadas whose incessant song tormented Pulci.¹²⁵ Pulci is in his element when composing polemical sonnets; the more specific the target, the better.

Ficino’s lament filled letters and Pulci’s equally petulant sonnets in response represent the polemic’s most heated and transparent point. Pulci’s sonnets that follow

¹²² This translation is qtd. fr. Fitzgerald.

¹²³ See Postelthwaite 125.

¹²⁴ The entry for “Chino” in *Garzanti Linguistica* is the following: “chinato, rivolto verso il basso: *starsene a capo chino*, in segno di umiltà, vergogna.”

¹²⁵ Other instances of this categorization of the Neoplatonic members by Pulci abound. In the *Morgante*: “Ma perché e’ c’è d’una ragione cicale / ch’io l’ho proprio agguagliate all’indiane, / che cantan d’ogni tempo e dicono male” (27.41.1-3). Pulci refers to his detractors as cicale in other sonnets: “I’ ho tanto grattato le cicale” (23.1); “Come tu senti fuor le cicalette” (106.5).

maintain the same level of animosity. They are also equally revealing of the motivation behind the contempt demonstrated by both Pulci and Ficino.

2.12 *Viso d'alocco*: Sonnet Attempt by Ficino?

Sonnet XCVII in the *Libro dei sonetti* is yet another literary attack directed specifically at Marsilio Ficino. One must keep in mind the censorship employed by the editor in the sonnet's opening verse. The sonnet is the following:

Viso d'alocco, la tua geometria
Non se ne sente in bocca mai a persona,
Che tu la metti donde il dopo nona
E riesce poi in chiasso, o in pazzeria.

Tanto che sia poi ver la profezia
Di dir la cetra tua: suonomi suona,
Che 'l popol ti vorrebbe già in canzona,
Et io son bucherato tuttavia.

Sonetti a me? Sonetti a te dich' io,
Tu stuzzichi, e ch' il fuoco, che t' abbruci,
Al cul l'arai, se tu sarai restio.

A ber tu me? via luci, luci, luci.
Il più reo pippioncin pio pio pio
Mozzagli il pincio, mucì, mucì, mucì.

Che dí tu che traduci
Caton? sia co malan che Dio ti dia,
O tu bestemmi la *geometria*.

Nani nani bugia
Tu ne recesti un dì tanta all' arciano.
Ritorna in chiasso, ghiontocel villano.

There is another instance of censorship in this sonnet: “Viso d'alocco” and “geometria” substitute *Marsilio Ficino* and *filosofia* (1). Pulci begins the sonnet by sustaining that Ficino's philosophy is not widespread; it is never spoken in Florence (2). According to Pulci, Marsilio's philosophy results only in “chiasso” and “pazzeria” (4).

Pulci delineates the cultural divisions along which the dispute was formed: popular poetry in Italian versus elitist philosophy in Latin. It is important to pause on this point for a moment. This is yet another of the many indications of the underlying fundamental dispute, and that the parties involved were aware of the cultural shift occurring. Even if Ficino had Lorenzo's support, he must have felt uneasy with the masses undoubtedly in favor of Pulci.

In the second quatrain Pulci pleads with Ficino to respond to him in "canzona," or verse (7). If Ficino were to respond to Pulci in verse, Pulci would find himself "bucherato" or riddled with holes (8). Line nine is interesting as it may allude to a sonnet attempt by Ficino: "Sonetti a me? Sonetti a te dich' io." Perhaps Ficino collaborated with Franco and participated in the composition of one of the many sonnets directed at Pulci by Franco.¹²⁶ It is also possible that Ficino had considered the composition of a sonnet and Pulci caught wind of this. Pulci literally tells Ficino that if he plays with fire, poetry in the vernacular reserved for poets, he will get burned.

The remainder of the sonnet does not relent. Pulci persists with his declaration of vernacular poetry's superiority and Ficino's lyrical impotency. In line 15 Pulci questions: "Che dí tu che traduci Caton?" (15). The strong contrast is drawn here in few words: the difference between those who create and those who translate; again, referencing the division between comic poets and humanist translators.

Interestingly, Pulci follows this interrogative by sustaining that Ficino blasphemes philosophy: "O tu che bestemmi la *geometria*" (17). This is again an instance of censorship; "geometria" is used in place of *filosofia*. Pulci is not simply against all philosophy; however, he is against Ficino's treatment of philosophy.

¹²⁶ The repetition in lines 12-14 is peculiar and may provide some insight into a rhyme scheme employed in such an attempted sonnet. However, a thorough search of the *Libro dei sonetti* proved fruitless.

2.13 *O venerabil gufo soriano*: Cultural Divisions Further Delineated

Sonnet XCVIII provides further insight into the public's reception of the polemic and Ficino's adverse reaction. The next sonnet in the *Libro dei sonetti* is the following:

O venerabil gufo soriano,
Geometria non ti diè buon consiglio,
Del tarabusso investigar l'artiglio
Pe' denti stuzzicar d' un cane alano.

Che sai che non ti può morder sì piano
Che non ti schiacci un tanto vil coniglio.
I' truovo tutto il popolo in bisbiglio,
Che aspetta ch'io lo 'mbecchi di mia mano.

E' dicon: pincio grosso, abaccia il nonno;
Che tu minacci già d'andare agli otto,
O di salir più alto al maggior Donno.

Quanto più su sarrai, maggior sia 'l botto;
Però fa come il ghiro quando ha sonno,
Entrati in qualche buca, e non far motto,

Che 'l ghiaccio, e 'l solco è rotto,
E tu se' il Saracin già posto in piazza,
E di carta, e d' orpello è la corazza.

E certo ognun sì guazza;
Ma soprattutto, o ceffolin da feccia,
Io t'ho quel chiasso là di Vacchereccia.

The initial verses again address the corrupted use of philosophy by Ficino to be fully developed in the sonnet to follow. Pulci warns Ficino that he misuses philosophy and in doing so, he provokes the teeth of a Great Dane (4). The third and fourth lines of the second quatrain describe the public awaiting Pulci's latest sonnets. Pulci declares to have the public eating from his hand as they beg for more (7-8). This again draws a stark contrast between the popularity of Pulci's brand of literary production and that of Ficino.

Line ten indicates the gravity Ficino assigned to Pulci's attacks: "Che tu minacci già d' andare agli otto." The eight mentioned here is the *Otto di Guardia e Balìa*, the council

responsible for policing political and criminal offenses. Ficino threatened to ask for the powerful group's intervention against Luigi's slander; this threat never materialized. Ficino's threats had no effect on Pulci and probably only incited him.

Line 17 of *O venerabil gufo soriano* refers to Ficino as the Saracen already placed in the piazza. This line is peculiar at first glance. The sonnets shared by Franco and Pulci were sung to the public as entertainment.¹²⁷ Bernardo Tasso writes that Pulci sang completed cantos at the Medici table.¹²⁸ Printed episodes of the *Morgante* circulated independently as they were completed, particularly the famed *Margutte* episode. It is most probable that Pulci's completed episodes from the *Morgante* were also sung to the public by *cantastorie*, adding to Ficino's exasperation.

In the last five cantos of the *Morgante* Ficino is presented behind the guise of the treacherous Re Marsilio of Spain, the King of the Saracens.¹²⁹ "E tu se' il Saracin già posto in piazza" may be a not so veiled reference to Ficino's representation found in episodes from the final cantos of the *Morgante* already completed by Pulci, sung to the public by one of the many *cantastorie* performing in Florence's piazze (16). *La rotta di Roncisvalle*, its literary topos thoroughly cemented in chivalric literature, would be an episode in high demand by the *cantastorie*'s clientele. The dates of composition of the *Morgante*, because of its episodic nature, are uncertain.¹³⁰ However, the composition of *La rotta* is usually deemed subsequent to the polemical sonnets. The sonnet at hand proposes the possibility that during 1475-76,

¹²⁷ See Villoresi, "Panoramica sui poeti performativi d'età laurenziana."

¹²⁸ The letter by Bernardo Tasso is found in Seghezzi 325.

¹²⁹ See Orvieto, ch. "Per un'interpretazione allegorico-polemica dei cantari XXIV-XXVIII" in *Pulci medievale* 244-84.

¹³⁰ For a chronological outline of the *Morgante*'s composition see section 1.3.1 of this study.

Pulci had begun to consider, or even completed, certain episodes including the allegorical representation of Ficino found in *La rotta*.

2.14 Buona sera, o miser, vien za, va drento: Philosophy Personified

Sonnet XCIX is perhaps the most entertaining of Pulci's sonnets directed at Marsilio Ficino. Pulci portrays philosophy as a woman named Sofia. Sofia invites the protagonist into her abode; he inquires as to her debilitated state. Once again, Pulci is not negating philosophy, but rather lamenting her mistreatment by Ficino. Pulci demonstrates philosophy's accessibility and noble nature corrupted by the "chiasso filato" of Ficino:

Buona sera, o miser, vien za, va drento;
– Tu fili? – Ella va mal; Cristo mal dia.
Misser, mi filo in chiasso son Sofia;
ribaldo in su e in giù suona tormento.

– Racconcia el lume un pocho ch'è già spento;
cognoscot'io: se' tu filosofia.
Chi t'ha condotta qua, figliuola mia,
in tanto vituperio miseria e stento?

– Condotta meschin m'ha, povera, brulla,
cattivo scilinguato fatto prete,
promesso sposar me stavo fanciulla

Né ch'io, né ch'io, o messer, non conoscete
star Celeno Arpia non voler nulla,
e Tantalo non aver più strana sete.

E retro lui vedrete,
cercar chiese, star Cristo nell'uova,
casa sua presso Sancta Maria Nuova,

passato ove si trova
piazza bella star chiesa di San Giglio
a man ritta a terzo uscio u' gli è *crespello*.

The sonnet begins with Philosophy inviting the protagonist inside her quarters (1). She is defensive at first, asking the protagonist if he spins (2). She has been spun up and

down in such a fracas by Ficino's mistreatment (3-4). She finds herself in the dark as "el lume un pocho ch'è già spento" (5). The protagonist recognizes her and declares: "cognoscot'io: se' tu filosofia" (6). The protagonist begins to interrogate Philosophy, asking her how she ended up in "tanto vituperio miseria e stento" (8).

The *figliuola* who represents Philosophy declares that a "cattivo scilinguato prete" made her poor and barren (10). Early sixteenth-century Ficino biographer Giovanni Corsi states: "He was a little hesitant of speech and stuttered, but only in pronouncing the letter 's'; yet in his speech and appearance he was not without grace."¹³¹ The description of a stammering priest is telling and lends itself to an identification of Ficino.

The evil, stuttering priest promised to marry Philosophy when she was a "fanciulla" or maiden (11). The insinuation here is that through false promises Ficino robbed Philosophy of her youth and purity. The last line of the penultimate tercet gives us further proof that Pulci is referring to Ficino. It states that he may be found near the hospital "Sancta Maria Nuova" (17). This is most likely the location where Ficino conducted his lessons as described in James Hankins's article "The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence":

. . . the Colucci dialogues seem to imply that the group met in the *Marsilii domus*. This appears to present a problem, since we know that Ficino rented out for income the house in Via S. Egidio given him by Cosimo and took a room in a house down the street next to his parents' house. It seems doubtful that Ficino could have accommodated a dozen or so "academics" in his private quarters. The likeliest solution is that his father, Dietifeci, allowed him to use a room in the large townhouse owned by the family on Via S. Egidio next to the hospital of S. Maria Nuova where the father worked. (457)

The sonnet concludes in censored editions with: "a man ritta a terzo uscio u' gli è *crespello*" (20). However, the word "crespello" is another instance in which the explicit nomination of

¹³¹ A translation of Corsi's biography on Marsilio Ficino is found in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* 3: 135-48.

Marsiglio, to rhyme with “chiesa di San Giglio” was removed by the first editor to protect Ficino’s identity (19-20).

Sonnet XCIX may be viewed as presenting an elevated style with the personification of philosophy and the allegorical representation of her mistreatment by Ficino. This sonnet seems to mirror or set the stage for the allegorical representation of Marsilio Ficino employed in the final five cantos of the *Morgante*. There is no doubt that while the cultural situation in Florence mutates and the Pulci-Ficino polemic matures, Pulci enhances his style attempting to uphold the worth of comic poetry in the face of Neoplatonism.

2.15 Franco Laments Gigi the *Animella*

While Ficino was undoubtedly agitated, Matteo Franco also boiled over as Pulci’s presence in the Medici house was too much for him to bear. A letter written from Franco to Lorenzo on January 24, 1476 is very telling of the high dudgeon in the Medici household.

Franco writes:

Sono el Francho. E’ non è mai, Magnifico Lorenço, uno schandolo sì grande che per qualche stravolta via non ne seghua alcun bene, o se non altro qualche exemplo a quegli che hanno a seguire, e confusione di mente a quegli che ne sono stati cagione. Io mi rallegro molto che meglo del nostro Monsignore in dua dì sia stata conosciuta la grandissima temerità di Gigi Pulci, la quale voi ne’ processi di vostra vita non havete conosciuta, o se pure la conoscete – che invero ne dubito – fate come chi si ghuasta in chiasso, che ancora ch’egl’intenda el suo errore, tirato dalla paçcia, multiplica im più inconvenienti andando drieto a sua bestiale impresa. Gigi è inportuno, Gigi è fastidioso, Gigi ha pessima lingua, Gigi paçço, Gigi arogante, Gigi seminator di schandoli, Gigi ha mille difeti secondo voi, et nondimeno sança Gigi non si può respirare in chasa vostra. Gigi è animella delle vostre palle. Havete tolto a mostrare la magnificentia et humanità vostre in tenere a ghalla questo dispecto della generatione humana. Parmi quando giungho in chasa vostra et vegho voi et poi riguardo questa asima afata, che sempre mi si rapresenti nella mente quello si dice degl’antichi trionphanti, a’ quali era posto apresso in sul charro uno huomo d’infima povertà et miseria per correggere la superbia et fasto di quello sì exaltato. Voi intendete di rafrenare l’allegreçça di chi vi vede colla

presenza di questa sciaghura. Ma se io credessi ancora io entrarvi nelle
chamarelle del cuore per questo verso, mi sforçerei di diventare tristo affato,
ancora ch'i' sappia nom potere tanto fare che io non gl'avessi a esser infimo
discepolo, e echomi pure adrieto . . .¹³²

The letter and sonnets prove that Pulci was still a mainstay in Medici circles in early 1476. The letter also presents a noteworthy incident cited by Franco. Franco states that a third party, “Monsignore,” also witnessed the “temerità” of Luigi Pulci over the course of two days. An identification of this person will shed light on the situation.

Alessio Decaria identifies the *Monsignore* as Archbishop Rinaldo Orsini.¹³³ Orsini was brother-in-law to Lorenzo. By appointing Orsini as archbishop, Lorenzo strategically gained influence in the Florentine church.¹³⁴ Rinaldo Orsini was a high ranking priest known for his relaxed approach in upholding statutes. In “Ecclesiastical Courts in Fifteenth-Century Florence and Fiesole” Gene Brucker addresses Orsini’s lack of effectiveness as archbishop:

Under the absentee archbishop, Rinaldo Orsini (1474-1508), the diocesan machinery for monitoring clerical behavior scarcely functioned. Orsini’s interest in the benefice was solely in its income, and his vicars general were not well qualified to administer the archdiocese. Through his promotion of Rinaldo, Lorenzo de’ Medici was directly responsible for the maladministration of the Florentine archdiocese in the last decades of the Quattrocento. (237)

It is apparent why Pulci may have garnered a certain amount of disdain for Orsini. Pulci’s long list of sonnets against sanctimonious hypocrites and false believers proves Pulci’s aversion for anything but traditional, conservative religion. Pulci viewed *spigolistri* and simonists as cut from the same cloth. Finding himself *fianco a fianco* with Orsini, one

¹³² Qtd. fr. Bongi 181-82.

¹³³ Decaria suggests just the name of Rinaldo Orsini, nothing more (*Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 231).

¹³⁴ See Brucker 31; Bullard, *Lorenzo Il Magnifico* 83.

who took advantage of his post as archbishop, proved too much for Pulci to bear. It is easy to envision a relentlessly mordant Pulci in the presence of Orsini.

The majority of critics have depicted Pulci as constantly fawning over Lorenzo's friendship. While Pulci undoubtedly cherished their friendship, he did act independently as he saw fit. The fact that Orsini was brother-in-law to Lorenzo and a high-ranking official in the church was secondary in Pulci's eyes. Pulci primarily identified Orsini as a clergyman whose faith and comportment could be associated to that of Franco and Ficino. Pulci despised this and let it be known to all.

2.16 Ficino's Requests for Intervention

Marsilio Ficino did not end up bringing his grievances to the *Otto di Guardia e Balia* as noted by Pulci in *O venerabil gufo soriano* (10). Interesting is the line in the sonnet that follows the threat: to circumvent the *Otto* and go directly to the "maggior Donno" (11). *Donno* is a form of the latin *dominus*; it is used as a title of honor, usually reserved for a prince.¹³⁵ Ficino did go to the "maggior Donno": none other than Lorenzo himself. Ficino wrote two letters to Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici at the end of 1476 to formally protest Pulci's behavior. Ficino's letter to Lorenzo begins:

The laws abhor infamous report and hate slanderers so much that they are particularly severe on those who speak foully, against even a foul man. We have both seen and approved the public observance of this twice—or rather, three times—during our life-time in Florence. But today I ask no such thing of the laws, for I do not wish the laws to be marshaled on my behalf against fleas, which will perish at the first onset of cold. (2: 12)

Ficino reminds Lorenzo that they have acted previously under similar circumstances, which would have been his same justification for going to the *Otto*. Ficino continues, stating

¹³⁵ See "Donno" *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani*.

that they have acted upon these laws in the past. Although Ficino states that he is not asking for intervention on his behalf against fleas, he actually does ask for intervention by the closing of the letter. Ficino continues:

So let that little imp bite your Christian priests with impunity, as he was long ago allowed to bite Christ. Let the mob judge at random a teaching which is scarcely known even to the very few. Let little men, who have no sense, pass sentence as they please on my life, which is known to God alone. For these similar matters I, like Socrates and Zeno, care nothing—or at most, like Aristotle and Theophrastus, very little. (2: 12)

The laments in the opening lines of the letter's second paragraph are all too familiar. The Christian priests are undoubtedly Ficino, Franco, and Orsini, possibly others. The second phrase from the letter is interesting: "Let the mob judge at random a teaching. . . ." As noted by Pulci in sonnets XCVII and XCVIII, the public seemed to favor Pulci as his literary output was far more accessible and present to the masses. Ficino proclaims that the common people did not understand his teachings and unjustly judged him. Ficino is thoroughly incensed by the public's siding with Pulci in the whole affair.

Ficino continues to liken himself to Socrates who states: "We ought not to object to be subjects for the comic poets, for they satirize our faults, they will do us good, and if not they do not touch us." Ficino states that he may also view the episode as Aristotle: "On hearing that someone abused him, he declared, 'he may scourge me as long as it be in my absence'."¹³⁶ However, unlike Socrates and Aristotle, Ficino cared very much about what was being said about him. Ficino concludes the letter:

Thus the lofty ramparts of sacred philosophy keep all such trifles far from us. Yet today this same philosophy gives me one bidding, that I should indicate to you the very way to discharge your duty—as you have done most diligently for us at other times. That is, with just the slightest tilt of the head show that you are displeased at what above all displeases God, namely, that something

¹³⁶ The lines from Socrates and Aristotle are qtd. fr. *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* 2: 89nn2-3.

holy, and indeed something of yours, is being given for dogs to tear or for their fleas to bite. (2: 12)

At this point Ficino could no longer tolerate Pulci's taunting; the public's support for Pulci was equally unbearable. Ficino was requesting an official condemnation of Pulci by Lorenzo. Ficino's letter to Giuliano de' Medici is briefer; however, he uses a similar analogy and asks for the same public pronouncement of disapproval:

I am not surprised that that dog constantly snarls at me, for it is his custom to snarl at good men and men of learning, as it is his custom to snarl at the soul and at God. Indeed, he is so conditioned by his character and habit that he cannot help snarling. This does not matter to me, since he is the kind of man from whom slander is praise and praise is slander.

Let him snarl in the company of the great and humble, so long as it is publicly understood that his snarling gives no pleasure to the Medici. (2: 13)

Giuliano and Lorenzo took action according to a letter from Ficino to close friend Giovanni Cavalcanti on January 1, 1477. In this letter Ficino states: "A few days ago, the two Medici each used against our adversaries in our case not only rebuke but even invective" (2: 44). Invective seems a strong categorization of a reprimand probably carried out to placate Ficino.¹³⁷ No matter the weight carried by the Medici's reprimand, which has not survived, Ficino's letter to Cavalcanti signals a cessation of open hostilities between Pulci and Ficino. However, the polemic did not cease to exist; attacks were conducted covertly by both Pulci and Ficino in their later literary output.

2.17 Apologia de moribus Platonis

The open polemic between Pulci and Ficino ended; however, neither abandoned their aversion for the other. Armando Verde sustains that Ficino's *De Vita Platonis* was written

¹³⁷ Polcri suggests that any reprimand may have been to satisfy Ficino's complaints (48).

when “la burrasca era passata” (314).¹³⁸ Paul Oskar Kristeller assigned late 1477 as the document’s date of composition.¹³⁹ This date would place the *Apologia de moribus Platonis*, concluding the *De Vita Platonis*, well after the letter by Ficino to Cavalcanti. Therefore, the document is subsequent to the end of open hostilities between Pulci and Ficino.

At the end of Ficino’s biographical exposition on Plato, he concludes:

I shall now draw to a close, once I have added a few more words.

There are some common rhymesters who without meriting it, usurp for themselves the name of poet. Roused as much by the difference in conduct as by the malice of envy, they mock shamelessly any man of excellence. And to these men a certain supreme licence is allowed against good men rather than bad, especially in our time. But let me not be mindful of our times, which are as incapable of pursuing virtue as they seem to be well capable of persecuting it. Accordingly, in former times, such petty poets did not hesitate to sink their teeth into the divine Plato, considered by the Greeks to be the son of Apollo, and also into Socrates, considered by Apollo to be the wisest of the Greeks. Diogenes Laertius utterly detested the impiety of these poets. And, as Diogenes declares, Aristippus of Cyrene, the most wicked man of his time and an adversary of the best one of his time, also added to the facetious abuse of the comic poets. Just as Aristippus slandered many other very virtuous and learned men with false stories, so he even slandered Socrates his teacher and his own fellow pupils, Xenophon and Plato. He made up certain lascivious poems in their names about harlots and young boys, evidently so that, by falsely using the great philosophers as examples, he might procure a freer licence to sin himself.

But Aristotle, to whom truth was more dear than Plato, could not tolerate such false calumny against a holy man. For in his elegies to Eudemus he recites those words about Plato which we have quoted above, paying him the greatest tribute: that profane men not only must not slander Plato in any way, but even, under the pretext of praise, they should not dare to utter his holy name through their profane mouths. And he was not content with an elegy, but also, according to Plympiódorus, composed a brilliant oration in praise of Plato.

Therefore let the hounds of hell be silent in the world of the living; rather let them howl in company with Cerberus in the world of the dead. But, for our part, let us venerate Plato’s life and wisdom, in the judgment of the wise regarded as the best, and together with Apuleius of Madaura let us freely proclaim: ‘We, the family of Plato, know nothing except what is bright, joyful, celestial and supreme.’ (3: 47-48)

¹³⁸ I am indebted to Alessio Decaria for illuminating the relevance of this passage to the Pulci-Ficino polemic (*Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 210-12).

¹³⁹ See Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1: 100-01.

The initial lines of the document are reminiscent of other texts written against Pulci. Ficino laments the permissive atmosphere of “the times.” They bear similarities to the lines from the letter to Bernardo Rucellai in which Ficino similarly laments the present generation that “produced this small but evil portent” (1: 170).

Ficino likens Pulci and his brethren to Aristippus and his slanderous, careless ways. The toxicity of Aristippus, and therefore Pulci, is duly noted as no one is immune to his calumny. Aristippus “made up certain lascivious poems” just as Pulci composed his sonnets against Ficino. Ficino furthers his argument by stating that profane men must not even pronounce Plato’s name, for just the fact that his name comes from a profane mouth, even in praise, would be slanderous.

In *Luigi Pulci and Francesco di Matteo Castellani* Decaria comments on the change in Ficino’s mission alluded to by this passage:

Va detto intanto che la collocazione del brano è estremamente rilevante e il suo contenuto è all’altezza di tale sede privilegiata: alla fine di un’agiografica biografia di quello che era . . . il nume tutelare della Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico. . . . qui Pulci è assimilato a quella schiera di poeti comici che attaccarono Platone; anzi s’insinua maliziosamente l’idea che tutti i poeti comici siano da condannare. . . . Credo che questo documento sia estremamente importante per certificare il mutamento d’indirizzo culturale promosso da Ficino. Un mutamento che, inscritto sotto l’astro di Platone e della filosofia, doveva necessariamente cancellare le tracce del precedente (e contrario) indirizzo: ecco allora che non è più Luigi Pulci il bersaglio . . . ora l’oggetto degli strali ficiniani è la poesia dei *plebei* che di quella si diletta e che quella usano per dileggiare i *boni* e i *sapientes*. . . . Qui è la filosofia, e la filosofia di Platone, che si oppone alla poesia, alla poesia comica; quella poesia comica a cui Luigi aveva consacrato gran parte della sua vita e del suo ingegno. (212-13)

The closing paragraph places all comic poets in the depths of hell alongside Cerberus: an all too familiar figure in the exchanges between Pulci and Ficino. According to Ficino, the popular poets only know the opposite of the closing proclamation: “bright, joyful, celestial

and supreme.” Therefore, according to Ficino, the comic poets know only the dark, sad, terrestrial and profane. The text is significant as it identifies a phase subsequent to the open polemic; a phase in which Ficino transitions to purge Florence of popular poetry and its proponents in the name of Plato.

2.18 Pulci and *La rotta di Roncisvalle*

Pulci also continued the polemic beyond open hostilities with his denigration of Ficino through the employ of allegory in the last five cantos of the *Morgante*. In “Tra Andrea da Barberino e Luigi Pulci” Marco Villoresi summarizes the *Morgante*’s critical reception:

Sulla interpretazione dell’opera maggiore del Pulci non c’è concordia tra gli studiosi, le cui posizioni sembrano oscillare entro due poli opposti. Che cos’è il *Morgante*, un testo di puro intrattenimento burchiellesco impostato su un mediocre copione – l’*Orlando* –, oppure un’opera originale, moralmente impegnata e dalla rigorosa struttura allegorica? (23)

The answer may be found at either end of the spectrum. It depends what part of the *Morgante* is analyzed. The *Morgante minore* largely preceded the years of full polemic with Ficino. Pulci composed the first 23 cantos during what one could call his *brigata* years. This first part of Pulci’s epic poem lacks an overall structure, maintaining an interchangeable episodic nature. Some of the octaves from this part of the poem closely follow Pulci’s source.¹⁴⁰ Pulci’s *modus operandi* during this period reflected the state of the care-free, improvised literary exploits of Lorenzo’s troupe.¹⁴¹

Pulci composed the final five cantos in a vastly different literary culture than the first 23: a new culture in which his worth had been questioned and deemed overvalued. The polemics had played out; Pulci understood his culture to be on the losing end. Marco

¹⁴⁰ See Davie, *Half-Serious Rhymes* 16-17; Lèbano, *Morgante* xii-xiii.

¹⁴¹ See De Robertis, *Morgante e lettere* xlvi; Pellegrini, *Luigi Pulci, L’uomo e l’artista* 151.

Villoresi notes the difference between the first 23 cantos and the last 5 in *La letteratura cavalleresca*:

Così, leggendo gli ultimi cantari, dove, comunque, non si attenua quella libertà d'azione e di creazione poetica che caratterizzava la prima parte del testo, si percepisce che la frattura non solo è cronologica e tematica, ma anche stilistica: accingendosi a narrare la carneficina di Roncisvalle, il narratore altera il suo punto di vista – più astioso che brillante, più circospetto che trionfale, più crepuscolare che solare – e cambia il registro espressivo (sul piano lessicale, ad esempio, il Pulci apre decisamente ai latinismi, alle voci dotte derivanti in primo luogo dal *Paradiso* di Dante e più fitte si fanno le citazioni dai classici e dalla Bibbia), caricando di nuovi significati la sua opera. Dietro il tessuto di seconda mano recuperato da un racconto arcinoto, si nasconde in realtà una trama assai sottile costellata di divagazioni astrologiche, filosofiche e religiose, che rinviano di continuo alla storia personale dell'autore e ai mutamenti culturali in atto nella Firenze medicea. (131)

In the last five cantos of the *Morgante* Pulci elevated his literary mission to prove the worth of the literary culture that he represented. The improved literary product includes the employ of an allegory not so complex. Through this allegory Pulci continued to attack Ficino. In Canto XXVII of the *Morgante* the narrator addresses the reader providing valuable insight into the change in cultural climate and the type of allegory to be found in *La rotta*:

Un cerchio immaginato ci bisogna
a voler ben la spera contemplare:
così, chi intender questa istoria agogna,
conviensi altro per altro immaginare;
perché qui non si canta e finge e sogna:
venuto è il tempo da filosofare;
non passerà la mia barchetta Lete,
che forse su Misen ci sentirete.

Ma perché e' c'è d'una ragion cicale
ch'io l'ho proprio agguagliate all'indiane.
che cantan d'ogni tempo e dicon male,
voi che leggete queste cose strane,
andate drieto al senso litterale,
e troverretel per le strade piane:
ch'io non m'intendo di vostro anagogico
o morale o le more o tropologico. (27.40-41)

Even though in line six of octave 40 Pulci concedes that philosophy's time is here, he states in line seven that his boat will not pass the river Lethe. Dante writes in *Inferno* 14: "Letè vedrai, ma fuor di questa fossa / là dove vanno l'anime a lavarsi / quando la colpa pentuta è rimossa" (136-38). Pulci does not want his reader to mistake his change in style for an admission of previous guilt and wrong doing.

Pulci likens his lost battle with Ficino to a scene from the *Aeneid*. Instead of the river Lethe, you may find Pulci's boat near Cape Misenus. Misenus thought he was better than Triton and challenged him to a horn-blowing contest; he was defeated by way of his impertinence and killed (*Aen.* 6.149-245).

In octave 41 of Canto XXVII Pulci begins by referencing the cicadas once again, epithet utilized thoroughly by Pulci to refer to Neoplatonists (41.1). In line two he compares them to Indian cicadas. In reference to Indian cicadas, Ageno addresses Pulci's further classification of the species: "perché son forse più grosse e rumorose" (*Morgante* 988). The note by Ageno lends insight into the opening lines of these octaves. In making his comparison of regular cicadas with a larger subspecies, Pulci admits to a slight act of aggrandizement. A slightly repentant line from the next canto comes to mind: "lasciato ho forse troppo andare la mazza" (28.142.2).

The lines that follow are telling as to Pulci's use of allegory. He states that what he writes might appear strange on the surface, but the reader must go beyond the literal sense to then find the easy road (27.41.4-6). In *La rotta di Roncisvalle* Pulci presents a fictive literal layer under which an allegorical meaning may be found.

Stefano Carrai paraphrases Pulci's message in this octave:

. . . chi voglia intendere appieno il significato della materia che ho narrato
dovrà afferrare il valore della metafora e dell'allegoria, immaginare altro per

altro; ma se dovesse trovare troppo difficile l'impresa, conviene che egli segua esclusivamente il senso letterale del racconto, che gli sarà facile decifrare.
(*Le muse dei Pulci* 146)

Paolo Orvieto describes Pulci's simple brand of allegory:

Non si tratterà di allegoria scolastica differenziata nel *Convivio* e nella *Lettera a Cangrande* in «morale» e «anagogica» (o escatologica), non si tratta di allegoria edificante di tipo dantesco, ma più semplicemente di allegoria «enigmatica»: nell'interlinea del contesto vengono celati «potenti huomini» e personali denunce polemiche. (*Pulci medievale* 253)

Orvieto presents a reading of the final cantos of the *Morgante* that he terms an “interpretazione allegorico-polemica” (*Pulci medievale* 244-83). Disguising a representation of Marsilio Ficino behind the literary character of the evil King Marsilio would certainly qualify as an allegory found immediately “drietto al senso litterale” (*Morg.* 27.41.5). Orvieto's allegorical reading has spurned other valuable allegorical readings of the *Morgante*.¹⁴² The next chapter of this study identifies yet another representation of Ficino in the *Morgante* behind the theological discourse of the devil-theologian Astarotte, an original addition by Pulci to the Italian epic tradition.

¹⁴² For allegorical readings of the *Morgante* see Carrai, ch. “Il giudizio universale nel «Morgante»” in *Le muse dei Pulci* 113-72; Martelli, *Letteratura fiorentina del Quattrocento* 198-240; and Polcri. As far as mistaken applications of allegory, Marco Villoresi cautions: “il tentativo di ‘salvare’ in via allegorica le disarmonie strutturali e concettuali del poema mi pare un po’ audace e fuorivante . . .” (“Tra Andrea da Barberino e Luigi Pulci” 24).

Chapter III

Astarotte and Malagigi

A study of the literary character Astarotte will advance a critical treatment of the topics that emerged from the previous chapter. Astarotte's theological discourse in Canto XXV closely resembles Marsilio Ficino's discourse in the *De Christiana religione*. The points of similarity between Astarotte's and Ficino's theology will support an allegorical representation of Ficino within the episode. Upon validation of the Ficino representation, a representation of Pulci himself is explored within the benevolent wizard Malagigi. Astarotte and Malagigi's interaction in Canto XXV will then be treated as a dialogue between differing theological points of view.

Pulci the narrator addresses a change in the *Morgante*'s style just before the Astarotte episode unfolds:

Io avevo pensato abbreviare
la storia, e non sapevo che Rinaldo
in Roncisvalle potrebbe arrivare;
un angel poi da ciel m'ha mostro Arnaldo,
che certo un aüttor degno mi pare,
e dice: – Aspetta, Luigi sta' saldo,
ché fia forse Rinaldo a tempo giunto. –
Sì ch'io dirò come egli scrive appunto. (25.115)

Critics are in agreement that “un angelo” refers to Angelo Poliziano.¹⁴³ The text that Poliziano shows to Pulci, written by Arnaldo, is fictitious.¹⁴⁴ Pulci identifies Arnaldo as a source to give the impression of historical veracity; it is actually Pulci himself who creates these parts. It seems that Pulci was somewhat discouraged, questioning the value of his *Morgante*. With the ouster of his brand of poetry from Medici culture, he may have considered the completion of his epic poem insignificant. He was possibly considering an abbreviated version of the final cantos (25.115.1). Poliziano intervenes and convinces him otherwise, advising Pulci to elevate the tone of the final five cantos.

In the next octave Pulci addresses his adversaries: “chi gracchia, chi riprende e chi rampogna” (25.116.5). In the ensuing octave Pulci describes his own academy or studio in contrast to that of the Neoplatonists: “La mia accademia un tempo o mia ginnasia / . . . / si ch’io non torno a vostri ariopaghi, / gente pur sempre di mal dicer vaghi” (25.117.1,7-8). The Areopagus was the high court of ancient Athens. Here Pulci uses the plural form to refer to any Neoplatonic assembly. Octaves 115 and 117 sequentially address a change in style, name detractors, and contrast Pulci’s *modus operandi* to that of the Neoplatonists. These lines introduce the Astarotte episode that begins in octave 118.

3.1 Astarotte’s Origins

Astarotte is a character not found in Pulci’s immediate sources; therefore, Pulci’s utilization of this character is intentional and telling as a commentary on Ficino. Astarotte’s origins may ultimately be traced back to Astarte, a second millennium BC Phoenician

¹⁴³ See Ageno, *Morgante* 866; Greco 959; Lèbano, *Morgante* 906.

¹⁴⁴ See Lèbano, *Morgante* 906; Puccini 1070.

goddess. In the Hebrew bible Ashteroth is a city east of the Jordan River. The city of Ashteroth is also found in early Greek and Latin versions of the Bible.¹⁴⁵ Ashteroth was also a Canaanite fertility goddess. These earliest representations of Astarotte bear little similarity to the male fallen angel depicted in Pulci's *Morgante*.

The first representation of an Astaroth resembling the sage demon found in the *Morgante* appears in 1458. The male demon is found in the Hebrew *Book of Abramelin* (112-13). The text is a manual of occult practices, describing why and how one would summon spirits. The *Abramelin* grimoire also has an index of demons containing Astaroth. In the *Morgante* episode Malagigi strikes a deal with Astarotte:

Se questo tu farai, io ti prometto
ch'a forza ma' più non ti chiamo o invoco,
e d'ardere alla morte un mio libretto
che ti può sol costringer d'ogni loco.
sì che poi più tu non sarai costretto. (25.120.1-5)

The instructional booklet will be burned and Astarotte will forever reside in peace if he helps Malagigi.

While Pulci may have garnered Astarotte's namesake from previous sources, he freely gave the fallen angel new characteristics. Specifically, Pulci's Astarotte is very wise, reveals classical erudition, and is well versed in theological discourse. Pulci's Astarotte heavily influenced Astarotte representations in subsequent grimoires and epic texts.

After Astarotte's debut in the *Morgante* he makes his way into other books on demonology, such as *The Lesser Key of Solomon* (ch. 29). In his early seventeenth-century *Histoire admirable de la possession d'une penitente*, Sebastien Michaelis classifies Astaroth as a demon of the first hierarchy who tempts men through laziness, vanity, and interestingly

¹⁴⁵ See Genesis 14.5 and Joshua 12.4.

enough, rationalizing philosophy.¹⁴⁶ The French inquisitor and Dominican priest sustains that Astaroth is opposed by the Apostle Bartholomew. The characteristics found in Astarotte representations subsequent to the *Morgante* are undoubtedly a product of Pulci's Astarotte.

3.2 Torquato Tasso's Letter

Before proceeding to an examination of the Astarotte episode, there is an epistle of Torquato Tasso that warrants critical consideration. The letter declares the authorship of the Astarotte episode to be of another. Although an exact conclusion to Torquato Tasso's surprising claim is unattainable, the famous chivalric poet's testimony is worthy of some reflection.

Bernardo Tasso, Torquato's father, left behind an important detail in his letters: "e Luigi Pulci tutti i canti della sua opera cantò alla tavola sua . . ." (Seghezzi 325). The table he refers to is that of Lorenzo de' Medici. Bernardo Tasso was born some ten years after Luigi Pulci's death; he received this information second hand. Bernardo was a poet who served Ferrante Sanseverino, a relative of the Roberto Sanseverino served by Luigi Pulci. Bernardo Tasso's connection to the Sanseverino family is one very possible source for his information regarding Pulci and the Medici. Another possible source for such information is Bernardo's wife Porzia de' Rossi of noble Tuscan origins.

Whatever the source for Bernardo Tasso's information on Luigi Pulci, it may have been the same for his son Torquato's intriguing affirmation. In a letter to Scipione Gonzaga in 1576, Torquato states: "Nel *Morgante*, Rinaldo portato per incanto va in un giorno da Egitto in Roncisvalle, a cavallo: e cito il *Morgante*, perché questa sua parte fu fatta da Marsilio Ficino, ed è piena di molta dottrina teologica" (Guasti 131-32). Torquato is referring to the Astarotte episode in Canto XXV. In the episode—to be discussed at length—the

¹⁴⁶ See "Astaroth" *Thelemapedia: The free encyclopedia of Thelema*.

benevolent wizard Malagigi summons Astarotte to possess Rinaldo's horse and carry him to Roncisvalle for the final battle. Leading up to and during the trip, Astarotte recounts what Angelo Gianni, author of *Pulci uno e due*, characterizes as “dodici ottave di teologismo puro . . .” (396).

Torquato Tasso's letter has been ignored by the most prominent of Pulci critics noted in this study. Torquato was a product of literary circles similar to that to which his father belonged. Torquato studied fervently and his statement regarding the Astarotte episode must not be disregarded. His preparation and the possibility of contact with possible firsthand accounts warrant, at the very least, consideration of a literary collaboration between Ficino and Pulci.

Many of Pulci's writings have been labeled as unconvincing, particularly his *Confessione*, in which he declares his orthodoxy. However, the Astarotte episode has not been bestowed with similar doubt. In *Luigi Pulci, l'uomo e l'artista*, Carlo Pellegrini identifies Pulci behind the words of Astarotte: “Tanto più che bisogna credere, specialmente per il calore di convinzione con cui Astarotte espone le sue idee, che queste sieno le stesse dell'autore del *Morgante*” (122). The Devil speaks with such conviction that no one doubts the sincerity of his theological claims. The only problem with Pellegrini's declaration is that the theology proposed—to be established shortly—is so clearly Ficino's.

Canto XXV is not Astarotte's first appearance in Pulci's poem. In Canto XXI Astarotte is mentioned for the first time: “o Astarot, che nel cavallo stette” (25.49.3). The fact that Astarotte is mentioned in Canto XXI with reference to a horse is interesting; in Canto XXV Astarotte enters Rinaldo's horse and possesses the steed. Critics agree that the

Canto XXI reference proves that Pulci had, at the very least, conceived Astarotte's function in Canto XXV during the composition of Canto XXI.¹⁴⁷

Cantos XX-XXIII were most likely finished during the first half of the 1470s. Canto XXI, Astarotte's first brief mention, may be dated with confidence to the early 1470s.

Literary collaboration was quite common in the early 1470s. The emergence of the *Nenciale* tradition, of which Lorenzo and Pulci were the main proponents, is evidence of the prevalent literary collaboration in Medici circles. It is probable that all of those present in Lorenzo's literary circles participated in the composition of the *Nenciali* texts.¹⁴⁸ The relationship between Pulci and Ficino in the early 1470s lacked the odium that emerged around 1475.¹⁴⁹

Astarotte's discourse mirrors the theological discourse by Ficino in his *De Christiana religione*. Ficino was undoubtedly working on this religious treatise in the early 1470s.

The Astarotte discourse may have been a literary collaboration conceived by Ficino and put to paper with Pulci's help, similar to the way in which Pulci and Benedetto Dei collaborated, and yet another instance of Pulci's *erbe pigliate*.¹⁵⁰ It does not seem so farfetched that during gatherings dominated by improvisational and collaborative composition, Pulci and Ficino may have created a theological discourse in the vernacular, ultimately utilized in Canto XXV. All the ingredients for Ficino's authorship are present: it is chronologically feasible, literary collaboration was common, and Pulci and Ficino frequented the same circles.

¹⁴⁷ See Ageno, *Morgante* 650; Greco 733; Lèbano 871; Puccini 801.

¹⁴⁸ I am indebted to Dr. Massimo Scalabrini for pointing out the widespread collaboration on *Nenciali* texts to me during a conversation at the 2008 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention.

¹⁴⁹ In February of 1474 Pulci and Ficino were still on good terms as evidenced by the letter *Io t'ò scripta questa colla mano che trema per la febbre*. It is in this letter that Pulci declares to have sent Ficino to Lorenzo to smooth over any rift created by the tension between Pulci and Franco. See section 2.3 for the letter.

¹⁵⁰ See section 2.6.

If the representation of Ficino and the theological discourse of Astarotte in Canto XXV had been conceived during the composition of Canto XXI, it would have probably warranted much more than a passing mention. The Astarotte episode's narratological function in Canto XXV, advancing the plot, was most likely conceived during the composition of Canto XXI. However, the Ficino representation was probably added after the polemic ran its course.

After the polemic between Pulci and Ficino unfolded, Pulci may have finalized the Astarotte episode as he saw fit. In other words, the theological treatise may have already been fashioned; Pulci may have simply inserted it into the already outlined frame with a new polemical tone. It is simply a question of where Pulci obtained the theology found in the episode. If Astarotte's discourse was not the fruit of a literary collaboration, and simply a transcription by Pulci from Ficino's *De Christiana religione*, little changes with regard to Pulci's treatment of Ficino's theology in Canto XXV.

3.3 Astarotte's Dual Function

The discourse of literary collaboration, or at the very least, composition of the Astarotte episode during two different periods is facilitated by a very clear binary structure within the episode. The Astarotte episode undoubtedly serves a narratological function: Astarotte, upon Malagigi's command, goes to Egypt to transport Rinaldo within three days to Roncisvalle for the final battle. Astarotte serves to inform Malagigi and the reader of Rinaldo's adventures far from Paris and Roncisvalle, Gano's treachery, and the impending bloodshed.

Pulci further utilizes the devil's presence in the poem by inserting a theological discourse. The theological voice in the episode is unmistakable. Astarotte addresses some of the most popular religious subjects of the time. Francesco De Sanctis describes the demon: "Astarotte è il nuovo spirito del secolo, motteggiatore, ironico, libero pensatore, che fa il teologo e l'astrologo, e spiega la bibbia a modo suo . . ." (*Storia della letteratura italiana* 373).

Not once does Pulci give a physical description of Astarotte. These are not the impulsive, medieval *malabranche* found in Dante's *Inferno*, so vividly depicted in Gustave Doré's nineteenth-century prints. Astarotte's deviance is found completely within his discourse.¹⁵¹ Astarotte is a Renaissance devil representative of those conducting similar theological discourse.

Attilio Momigliano amplifies De Sanctis's description of Astarotte in *L'indole e il riso di Pulci*: "Questo personaggio empio, colto, ipocrita, garbato, non più terribile, perché, diminuendo la fede in Dio, diminuisce anche il timore del suo avversario, non potrebbe vivere fra gli uomini ingentiliti del quattrocento che osano ancora dichiararsi atei, ma operano da miscredenti pur parlando devotamente della religione?" (336-37). The result of Pulci's combination of the unique narrative framework and the theological discourse is a parody of Ficino's theology; essentially, Ficino's theology from the mouth of a humanist devil.

¹⁵¹ The only physical description of Astarotte is his defiant glare. In reaction to Astarotte's initial scowl, Malagigi says to Astarotte: "Ma non guardar con sì terribil faccia" (25.119.8). Astarotte puts forth another futile attempt at fending off Malagigi with a menacing stare: "Per che lo spirito, braveggiato un poco, / istava pure vedere alla dura / se far potessi al maestro paura" (25.120.6-8).

3.4 Astarotte's Combination of Classical, Astrological, and Biblical

Many critics agree that Astarotte's discourse approximates Ficino's *De Christiana religione*; however, an actual textual comparison has never been conducted. Astarotte's first lines in the *Morgante* recount Rinaldo's trip to Paganía. He tells Malagigi that Rinaldo's companions wanted to see all of Greece on their way to Egypt. This provides the occasion for Astarotte to display his stellar classical erudition.

Astarotte details Rinaldo and his entourage's crossing of the Straits of Hellespont and their ascent of Mount Olympus.¹⁵² During Rinaldo's ascent he kills a chimera, a Greek mythological monster (25.123-25).¹⁵³ Astarotte's familiarity with Greek mythology is the first indicator that Ficino's identity is behind the guise of Astarotte. Ficino was well known for his translations from Greek and was one of the foremost experts of Greek culture and literature of his time.

At times during his dissertation Astarotte shows a deft knowledge of astrology. When early in the episode he mentions Turnus from the *Aeneid*, he states that Turnus was especially unfortunate in combat because of Saturn's and Mars's menacing positions (25.138). Astarotte also cites the recent passing of comets *Veru* and *Dominus Ascone* as infallible signs of treason and war, and death of "gran principi e magnati" (25.139). He declares that the planets are aligned even more malevolently for the final battle at Roncisvalle, sure to be extremely violent (25.139.5-8).

Davide Puccini comments on Astarotte's astrological references: "La fonte del Pulci è Lorenzo Bonincontri, lettore all'Accademia platonica dal 1475 al '77 . . ." (1078). While

¹⁵² This episode from the *Morgante* and the topos of the ascension is discussed at length in Polcri, 195-230.

¹⁵³ The chimera is usually depicted as having a lion's head and body with the head of a goat emerging from its back; a serpent serves as the creature's tail.

Pulci was certainly familiar with Bonincontri, Ficino had a much more intimate relationship with the astrologer. Ficino sought Bonincontri's insight into astrological questions evidenced by their correspondence.¹⁵⁴

In "Luigi Pulci e Lorenzo Bonincontri" Rossella Bessi conducts a textual comparison and identifies Ptolemy's *Centiloquium* as a primary source for Astarotte's theology (295). Astarotte cites Ptolemy, just as Ficino does in chapters 26, 27, 30, and 36 of his *De Christiana religione*. The presence of certain astrological influences and texts in the Astarotte episode seem to have been employed by Pulci to further indicate a representation of Ficino's *De Christiana religione*.

In addition to Greek and astrological sources, Astarotte incorporates a third source into his discourse. Astarotte supports his theological exposition with Biblical excerpts and paraphrases. His actual words at times come very close to verbatim Biblical quotations.¹⁵⁵ In defense of his treatise on the Trinity, Astarotte chastises Malagigi for not having read the Bible with enough attention:

Disse Astarotte: – Tu non hai ben letto
la Bibbia, e parmi con essa poco uso:
che, interrogato del gran dī, il Figliuolo
disse che il Padre lo sapeva solo. (25.141.5-8)

Astarotte's reprimand references Mark 13.32: "Quanto a quel giorno e a quell'ora, nessuno li sa, neppure gli angeli del cielo, neppure il Figlio, ma solo il Padre."

When not quoting Scripture, he references specific episodes from the Bible, such as Pilate's persecution of Christ. The mention of Pilate in the *Morgante* is as follows:

¹⁵⁴ See *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* 2: 26; 3: 81.

¹⁵⁵ See *Morgante* 25.141.7-8 and Mark 13:32; *Morgante* 25.145-46 and Matthew 4:1-11; *Morgante* 25.158.8 and the Book of Psalms 145.17; *Morgante* 25.184.4 and Matthew 2:12; *Morgante* 25.189.6-8 and the Book of Judith from the Catholic Bible 8-13.

Ché, se quell Savio non rispose allotta,
quando Pilato domandò quel ch'era
la verità, fu ch'e' l'aveva appresso,
sì che questo ignorar gli fu dimesso; (25.154.5-8)

se non che nel ben far perseverato
non ha costui quando le man s'imbianca. (155.1-2)

These verses reference Scripture: “Pilato, vedendo che non otteneva nulla, ma che si sollevava un tumulto, prese dell'acqua e si lavò le mani in presenza della folla, dicendo: «Io sono innocente del sangue di questo giusto; pensateci voi»” (Mark 27:24). These are the same lines from the Bible cited by Ficino in Chapter 29 of the *De Christiana religione*: “Infatti quando Pilato disse: «Io sono innocente del sangue di questo giusto, voi ne siete responsabili», essi risposero: «Il suo sangue sopra di noi, e sopra i nostri figli»” (171).

In the same octave Astarotte mentions Origen, an early Christian theologian (25.155).¹⁵⁶ Origen stated that at the end of time there will no longer be sinners and devils. Astarotte states that Origen's prediction had still not come to fruition while Pilate and Judas operated. Ficino cites Origen repeatedly in the *De Christiana religione*.¹⁵⁷

Both Astarotte in the *Morgante* and Ficino in the *De Christiana religione* are forgiving towards Pilate. In the *Morgante*, Astarotte excuses Pilate because of his ignorance. In chapter 29 of the *De Christiana religione*, Ficino declares the Jewish people to be more at fault than Pilate. Later in the canto Astarotte demonstrates an anti-Jewish sentiment similar to that of Ficino. Astarotte cites the same classical, astrological, and Biblical sources that Ficino cites in the *De Christiana religione*. Astarotte also echoes Ficino's tone and sentiment, strengthening the link between the devil-theologian and Ficino.

¹⁵⁶ Origen's orthodoxy was questioned for his belief in the transmigration of souls.

¹⁵⁷ See Ficino, *De Christiana religione* chs. 7, 11, 23, 27, 35. See also Vasoli, 167.

3.5 Salvation for Other Religions

During the aerial horse ride from Egypt to Roncisvalle, Rinaldo asks Astarotte if followers of other religions are able to attain salvation as do Christians (25.232.4-5).

Astarotte responds with a discourse that Angelo Gianni describes as in “piena concordanza col platonismo del secondo Quattrocento” (396). Astarotte states that having faith is first and foremost:

Basta che sol la vostra fede è certa,
e la Virgine è in Ciel glorificata.
Ma nota che la porta è sempre aperta
e insino a quel gran dì non fia serrata,
e chi farà col cor giusta l’offerta,
sarà questa olocaüsta accettata;
ché molto piace al Ciel la obbedienza,
e timore, osservanzia e reverenzia. (25.234)

Astarotte states that religion, even that of those who came before Christ, “discerne le bestie degli umani” (25.235.6). These lines are similar to the opening of the *De Christiana religione*: “Inoltre, se l’uomo è il più perfetto degli animali mortali, in quanto uomo è il più perfetto di tutti per quella dote principalmente che egli possiede come propria, in mezzo a quelli, non comune agli altri animali; essa è la religione, perciò egli è perfettissimo a causa della religione” (30).

Asatrotte states that the Romans ultimately pleased God with their rituals:

Mentre lor ceremonie e devozione
con timore osservorono i Romani,
benché Marte adorassino e Iunone
e Giuppiter e gli altri idoli vani,
piaceva al Ciel questa religione. (25.235.1-5)

Ficino also treats the Romans favorably in his *De Christiana religione*, particularly for their acknowledgment of prophets and Sibyls and the punishment they administered to

those who negated the *Figlio di Dio*.¹⁵⁸ According to Ficino, the Romans admirably resisted impiety:

I greci e i romani, poco prima che risplendesse la luce di Cristo, avevano cominciato, sempre più, di giorno in giorno, a farsi corrompere dall'empietà contagiosa di Aristippo e di Epicuro. Innumerevoli martiri, sull'esempio di Cristo, in ogni luogo, sia illetterati sia dottissimi, disprezzando la vita presente per amore dell'unico Dio e della vita futura, offrirono agli uomini una medicina molto salutare contro il veleno di Aristippo e di Epicuro.¹⁵⁹ (101)

In octave 236 Astarotte refers to "quella gente," or the antipodes: the people who live on the other side of the world (1). Astarotte addresses the possibility for these people to attain salvation:

Dico così che quella gente crede,
adorando i pianeti, adorar bene;
e la giustizia sai così concede
al buon remunerazio, al tristo pene:
sì che non debbe disperar merzede
chi rettamente la sua legge tiene:
la mente è quella che vi salva e danna,
se la troppa ignoranza non v'inganna. (25.236)

The Antipodes worship in the manner that they deem appropriate. Astarotte states that those who worship in the way they feel best, please God. Chapter four from the *De Christiana religione* resembles this discourse:

Perciò la divina provvidenza non permette che in qualche lasso di tempo vi sia alcuna regione del mondo del tutto priva di ogni religione, sebbene permetta che nei vari luoghi e tempi, si osservino vari riti di culto. Forse una tale varietà, regolata da Dio, genera una qualche ammirabile bellezza nell'universo. Il re supremo ha più a cuore di essere onorato, in effetti, che di ricevere onori con questi o con quei gesti. (38)

¹⁵⁸ See *De Christiana religione* 106, 158

¹⁵⁹ Ficino equated Pulci and comic poets to the "most wicked" Aristippus in the *Apologia de moribus Platonis*. See section 2.17.

Although initially stating that all may be saved through their faith, Astarotte qualifies that statement just three octaves later. He affirms that blatant negations of Christ and God are unacceptable:

Nota ch'egli è certa ignoranza ottusa
o crassa o pigra, accidiosa e trista,
che, la porta al veder tenendo chiusa,
ricevette invan l'anima e la vista:
però questa nel Ciel non truova scusa:
«*Noluit intelligere*» il salmista
dice d'alcun, tanto ignorante e folle
che, per bene operar saper non volle. (25.237)

Astarotte is referring to the Jews as those whose ignorance is too obtuse, crass, and lazy.¹⁶⁰

In Chapter 29 of the *De Christiana religione*, Ficino explains in detail the faults of the Jews. The chapter is aptly entitled “Contro i giudei, infelici in cospetto alla vendetta di Cristo.”¹⁶¹ Earlier in Ficino’s work he describes certain Jewish writings as “deliri spregevoli del Talmud” (57-58). In octave 240 Astarotte echoes Ficino’s disgust with the writings of the sacred Jewish text, the Talmud:

e tutti i Giudei perfidi e pagani,
se la grazia del Ciel non rammanta,
dannati sono, e le lor legge tutte
dell’Alcoran de’ matti e del Talmutte. (25.240.5-8)

Astarotte addresses the ignorance of the Jews in the face of the prophets:

Vedi quanto gridato hanno i profeti

¹⁶⁰ See Lèbano, *Morgante* 913.

¹⁶¹ At the opening of the chapter Ficino poses a rhetorical question to the Jews: “Dite, per favore, o giudei, perché in quel vostro volume di nuove leggi, il Talmud, che componeste circa quattrocento anni dopo Gesù, avete stabilito contro i cristiani leggi più crudeli di quanto poterono escogitare Nerone e Domiziano? . . . Di certo, poiché molti tra voi, per empia negligenza e ignoranza delle scritture, non credettero che Gesù, senz’armi, fosse il vero Messia (165-66).” It is unclear which lines of the Talmud Ficino is referring to. Roberto Zanzarri, the editor of the edition, includes a footnote including the Ficino’s original Latin: “Crudeliore aduersum leges, quam Nero et Domitianus excogitare potuerunt, statuistis?” (166n1). Regardless of which lines Ficino is referring to, there is no doubt that he views the Talmud in a negative light.

della Virgin, dell'alto Emanuello,
e da quel tempo in qua son tutti cheti
che il Verbo santo si congiunse a quello;
tante Sibille, insin vostri poeti
disson che il secol si dovea far bello:
leggi Eritrea, del signor nazzareno,
che dice insin che e' giacerà nel fieno. (25.241)

In chapter 25 of the *De Christiana religione*, entitled “L’autorità dei profeti, la nobiltà dell’antico testamento, l’eccellenza del nuovo,” Ficino addresses the same Erythrean Sibyl found in the octave above. Ficino’s lines are the following: “Aurelio Agostino allega molti versi della Sibilla Eritrea, tradotti in latino, che egli vide in Greco presso il proconsole Flacciano, uomo celeberrimo per la sua dottrina; e nei capitoli l’ordine delle lettere era tale che si leggeva: Gesù Cristo Figlio di Dio Salvatore” (112). According to both Astarotte and Ficino, the Jews ignored the Sibyls and are, therefore, further culpable for their explicit negation.

Astarotte’s initially accommodating view on salvation mirrors statements made by Ficino in the *De Christiana religione*. However, Astarotte declares that the Jews’ blatant negation of Christ, in spite of the Sibyls’ and prophets’ premonitions, is just too egregious. Astarotte’s anti-Jewish sentiment mirrors statements made in the *De Christiana religione*, yet another link between Ficino and the Astarotte character.

3.6 Astarotte the Hypocrite

Astarotte’s very being is full of contradiction.¹⁶² He states that all may be saved, while later explaining who will be damned. He is a devil that helps Christian paladins. He is a devil that quotes the Bible and chastises others for not having read it carefully. He has

¹⁶² For a similar discourse on Astarotte’s hypocrisy see Momigliano 336.

intimate knowledge of the heavens, although he has been banished from them. His speech and demeanor are independent, contrasted by his ultimate and unconditional service to Malagigi.

Astarotte's contradictions continue. Astarotte gives instructions to Malagigi on how to tie up the loose ends associated with Rinaldo's transport to Roncisvalle. Astarotte advises Malagigi to dispel any suspicion and trust Beelzebub, the prince of the devils (25.165-166). However, upon reaching Rinaldo, Astarotte advises him to do the opposite:

E se vuoi pur che il ver presto ti dica,
non ti fidar di noi se non col pegno,
perché alla vostra natura è nimica
la nostra per invidia e per isdegno. (25.208.1-4)

In the final five cantos Pulci's narrative voice addresses the reader increasingly. Pulci precedes the Astarotte episode by acknowledging the seemingly inconsistent style full of contradiction. In octave 168 the author indicates that there is motive behind his seemingly inconsistent style:

Or lasciam Astaròt andar per l'aria,
ché questa notte troverà Rinaldo:
la nostra istoria è sì fiorita e varia
ch'i' non posso in un luogo star mai saldo;
e non sia altra oppinìon contraria,
ché troppe belle cose dice Arnaldo;
e ciò ch'e' dice, il ver con man si tocca,
ch'una bugia mai non gli esce di bocca. (25.168)

The Arnaldo addressed in octave 168 is the second mention of the fictitious poet. The first Arnaldo reference is correlated to Pulci's elevation of the poem's tone in the face of cultural irrelevance as an outcome of the polemics. The reference to Arnaldo in this later octave may be viewed in a similar light. Pulci is again using the Arnaldo text as a testament, an authority of sorts, to the underlying meaning found in a text worthy of being used as one

of his sources. Pulci is cautioning those who might mistakenly judge his seemingly inconsistent style as inferior, a critique leveled at the *Morgante minore* by contemporaries.

3.7 “Ognun erra a voler giudicar il Ciel di terra”

In the ultimate act of hypocrisy, Astarotte chastises those who speak about the same topics found in his discourse. Astarotte states that he was one of the principal seraphim before his fall from grace. There is no doubt that Astarotte is speaking exclusively as a fallen angel; his firsthand knowledge of the heavens gives him authority on the subject. In octave 159 he unleashes a reprimand on poets, philosophers, and theologians:

E poeti e filosofi e morali
queste cose ch'io dico anche non sanno;
ma la presunzion vuol de' mortali
saper le gerarchie come elle stanno.
Io ero serafin de' principali,
e non sapea quel che quaggiù detto hanno
Dionisio e Gregorio, ch'ognun erra
a voler giudicare il Ciel di terra. (25.159)

Even from his privileged place in the heavens, Astarotte could not hear what Dionysius the Areopagite professed. Dionysius was popular with Catholic Platonists because of certain Neoplatonic texts attributed to him in the sixth century detailing the structure and hierarchy of the heavens. Astarotte declares that it would have been impossible for Dionysius to know the order of the heavens from his vantage point on earth.

To read a synthesis of Dionysius's *De coelesti hierarchia* one need go no further than the fourteenth chapter of Ficino's *De Christiana religione*. The chapter is appropriately entitled “L'ordine dei cieli degli angeli, delle anime intorno alla trinità come l'ordine delle sfere intorno al centro.” Ficino summarizes and supports Dionysius:

Come ritiene Dionisio Areopagita, vi sono tre gerarchie degli spiriti celesti, ciascuna delle quali contiene tre ordini. Ciascun ordine come calcolano alcuni

teologi, contiene molte legioni: ritengono che una legione consti seimilaseicentosessantasei unità, e che nei singoli ordini vi siano tante legioni quante sono le unità che la legione stessa abbraccia. Ma io consento maggiormente con Dionisio che dice essere tanta la moltitudine di quegli spiriti, da eccedere la facoltà di calcolo degli uomini.¹⁶³ (81)

According to Astarotte, anyone who judges the heavens from earth errs. Ficino agrees with and cites Dionysius; therefore, he is one who errs. Astarotte embraces the Ficino representation; the reader cannot ignore the likeness between his discourse and that of Ficino. However, he also reveals the main flaw in Ficino's discourse: a lack of firsthand knowledge while speculating on divine matters.

Maintaining the same authoritative tone, Astarotte continues in the following octave:

E sopra tutto questo ti bisogna
non ti fidar di spiriti folletti,
ché non ti dicon mai se non menzogna
e metton nella mente assai sospetti
e farebbon più danno che vergogna;
e perché intenda, e' non vengon costretti
nell'acqua o nello specchio, e in aria stanno,
mostrando sempre falsitate e inganno. (25.160)

In Octave 160 Astarotte mentions that the most malicious spirits cannot be contained within water or mirrors; they carry out their falsehood and deceit in the air, an abstract medium. With regard to the "spiriti folletti" Davide Pucini states: "il poeta vuol riferirsi a personaggi reali" (1086). This brings us to one of the main points of difference between Malagigi and Astarotte. Malagigi performs a brand of magic bound within the realms of nature, while Astarotte's powers and knowledge derive from the supernatural, be it divine or demonic.

¹⁶³ In 1457 Lorenzo Valla fervently contested the authorship of these texts. Valla had followers. By the first years of the sixteenth-century Erasmus accepted Valla's argument and the texts have been attributed ever since to an author known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

3.8 Equine Possession

Astarotte's possession of Baiardo in Canto XXV is not the first time that the notoriously feisty steed has been under the control of another. In Canto V Malagigi possesses Baiardo in a like manner to play a prank on Rinaldo.¹⁶⁴ Malagigi disguises himself as an exhausted old man (5.22.2-4). Rinaldo sympathizes and lets the incognito Malagigi mount his steed to give his legs a rest (5.24.3-4). As soon as Malagigi touches the bridle, the feisty Baiardo comes under complete control of the wizard in disguise (5.26.1-4). Malagigi quickly flees "come un leopardo" (5.28.7). Rinaldo and his companions frantically give chase. Malagigi eventually relinquishes control of the horse and reveals his true identity; the prank is over (5.29). A comparison of this scene with the Astarotte scene in Canto XXV, both contained within similar frameworks, will clarify the differences between Malagigi's and Astarotte's powers.

There are lines in each scene that may reference the other episodes respectively, advancing the call for a textual comparison. In Canto XXV, right before Astarotte occupies Baiardo, the horse protests in light of a similar past experience:

Quando Baiardo il diavol sentiva,
perch'altra volta di questi alloggiòe,
intese ben come la cosa giva,
e come un drago a soffiare cominciòe (25.211.1-4)

¹⁶⁴ Franca Ageno explains Malagigi's lineage in her commentary after his debut in Canto III: "*Malagigi* (il Maugis ladrone del *Renaus* o *Quatre fils d'Aymon*) e Viviano, nella tradizione italiana, sono cugini di Rinaldo e di Orlando, perché il padre loro, Buovo d'Agrismonte, è fratello di Amone, padre del primo, e di Mil(l)one, padre del secondo paladino. Malagigi è mago, comanda ai demoni e, gettando l'arte, cioè interrogando la sorte mediante incantesimi, conosce il futuro e le cose nascoste" (*Morgante* 66).

Critics deny that this is a reference to another scene from the *Morgante*. They explain it as one of the many inaccuracies found in Pulci's *Morgante*.¹⁶⁵ Their textual searches have obviously neglected Canto V. This omission may be because of Malagigi's vocation as a wizard as opposed to a devil.

Yet, Malagigi's magical powers are characterized as devilish more than once in the *Morgante*. The most explicit description of Malagigi as diabolic is found in Canto XXI. The narrator describes the initial encounter between Malagigi and Creonta: "Malagigi guarda i suoi brutti vestigi, / e lei pur lui, e par piena d'angosce, / ché l'un diavolo ben l'altro conosce" (21.66.6-8).¹⁶⁶ There is a similar characterization of Malagigi's powers in Canto XXIV. Before dealing with Creonta's giants, Orlando tells a frightened Charlemagne that Malagigi will take care of everything: "che Malagigi ha due volte affermato / ch'io lasci a lui de' giganti la briga; / e l'un diavol sai l'altro gastiga" (24.89.6-8). It is almost certain that the mention of a previous possession in Canto XXV references the episode in Canto V.

After Malagigi pulls his prank, Rinaldo explains his bewilderment. Malagigi responds: "– Tu non sai ancora, innanzi ch'io tel dica, / di questo testo, Rinaldo, le chiose. –" (5.30.5-6). These are verses that have puzzled critics.¹⁶⁷ A reference to the importance of Canto V for future cantos may be deduced from these verses; however, it requires a slightly more attentive reading.

¹⁶⁵ Aulo Greco calls this reference "una affermazione generica" (990). Davide Puccini states: "il Pulci non si riferisce ad un episodio del poema e l'affermazione deve quindi essere estemporanea" (1103). Franca Ageno simply states in the first person: "non ho trovato riferimento" (893).

¹⁶⁶ After a textual comparison with other contemporary chivalric texts, Paolo Orvieto comments on the scene with Creonta: "E indubbio che le porte di ingresso abbiano un significato allegorico e che l'ingresso dei paladini nel castello di Creonta non sia altro che l'ingresso nell'inferno e l'incontro col demonio" (*Pulci Medievale* 125).

¹⁶⁷ Ageno paraphrases the lines: "non conosci ancora la ragione, la spiegazione di questo fatto" (120). Lèbano states: "Malagigi's answer to Rinaldo . . . seems obscure" (790).

The *chiose* referenced by Malagigi resembles the usage of *chiosar* by Dante in *Inferno* XV: “Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo, / e serbolo a chiosar con altro testo / e donna che saprà, s’a lei arrivo” (*Inf.* 15.88-90).¹⁶⁸ In his commentary on *Inferno* Ronald Martinez states: “In *scrivo* [I am writing down] and *chiosar* [to gloss], the metaphor of the book of memory appears” (243). Malagigi may be telling Rinaldo to take note for future reference. After all, Malagigi’s powers do include a certain clairvoyance. Rinaldo’s future trip on the same possessed horse from Egypt to Roncisvalle is the driving force behind the Astarotte episode in Canto XXV.

Davide Puccini comments on Malagigi’s use of *chiose*: “e nello stesso senso Pulci usa anche *postille*” (146). These are revisionary or explanatory notes found in the margin of the text, similar to those in Latin written by Petrarch in the margins of his *Canzoniere* for organizational purposes. The term *chiose* in the *Morgante* is loaded with significance not just for Rinaldo, Malagigi and Baiardo, but also for the reader as the author himself may be commenting here on his writing process and the link between the two episodes. The two scenes at opposite ends of Pulci’s epic have many points of congruence not to be ignored.

3.9 Malagigi’s Nature

Malagigi’s forces are most definitely bound within the natural realm. His physical appearance draws sympathy from Rinaldo, serving as the catalyst for the Canto V scene.

Malagigi’s physical disguise is the following:

Un giorno in un crocicchio d’un burrone
hanno trovato un vecchio molto strano,

¹⁶⁸ The entry for “Chiosa” in *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana di Ottorino Pianigiani* states: “Breve dichiarazione di una parola o di un passo oscuro che si fa ad alcun testo. Vale anche Macchia: forse presa la similitudine dalle note apposte sul margine di un libro.”

tutto smarrito, pien d'afflizione:
non pareva bestia e non pareva umano.
Rinaldo gli venia compassione:
«Chi fia costui?» fra sé diceva piano:
vedea la barba arruffata e canuta:
raccapricciosi, e dappresso il saluta. (5.22)

Malagigi secures Rinaldo's piety and charity through manipulation of his physical appearance. This is in contrast to Astarotte's lack of physical description. Rinaldo's companions praise him for demonstrating piety and charity.

Malagigi's stunt in Canto V takes place in the perfect setting: none other than a dark wood. The forest, especially for the Renaissance reader, was a setting conducive to magic. At the end of the episode Malagigi reveals himself to Rinaldo through a change in his voice. This occurs right on the edge of the wood. If he were to exit the wood, the mood of the scene and, probably, his magic would be compromised.

Malagigi, literally, running around in the woods stands out against the aerial, heavenly flight of Astarotte and Rinaldo. The narrator describes the altitude of Astarotte's voyage: "da dir «Fetone più basso ebbe il curro»" (25.226.4). Astarotte conducts Baiardo and Rinaldo on a higher trajectory than that of Ovid's Phaëthon (*Metamorphoses* 2.28-40). Phaëthon recklessly drove Helios's chariot to the sun in an unsuccessful attempt to prove his lineage. Astarotte's voyage to the heavens is most definitely the inverse of Malagigi's dark woods.

Both Astarotte in Canto XXV and Malagigi in Canto V offer herbal gifts to Rinaldo. Once again, the narrative framework is almost identical; however, the mode, the motivation, and the intended use of each of these offerings differ greatly and fall in line with the moods of their respective episodes. In Canto V Malagigi advises Rinaldo:

– Per questa selva ove condotti siete
non troverresti da mangiare né bere,

e senza me campati non sarete:
di questa barba vi conviene avere,
che vi torrà e la fame e la sete;
vuolsene in bocca alle volte tenere. –
E dette loro un'erba e disse: – Questa
usate insino al fin della foresta. – (5.32)

Aulo Greco defines the *barba* that Malagigi offers the paladins as “radice minore delle piante” (178). The etymology of *barbabetola* may certainly be traced to *barba*.

Malagigi's offering demonstrates an intimate relationship with nature as this root is found below the earth's surface. Malagigi further displays his knowledge of flora by explaining the difference between this *barba* and common *erba*: “e' destrier sempre troverran dell'erba, / ma questa per la sete si riserba” (5.33.5-8). Ultimately, the *barba* carries no magical powers; it is just unique and difficult to find.

In contrast to Malagigi's unsolicited offering, Astarotte's herbal offering to Rinaldo is solicited. When Astarotte and Rinaldo first encounter each other and speak about the voyage, Rinaldo asks: “Sarebbe, dimmi, Astaròt, possibile / che pel cammin tu ci porti invisibile?” (25.203.7-8). Astarotte's response matches the esoteric nature of Rinaldo's request:

Disse Astarót: – E' fia per certo: aspetta
tanto ch'io mandi insino in Etiopia,
e porteratti uno spirito una erbeta
che può far questo, e non pure eliotropia;
e basta sol ch'addosso te la metta,
ché così è la sua natura propria;
e dove manca ragione o scienza,
basta al savio veder la sperienza. – (25.204)

Astarotte sends the invisible demon Milusse to the Antipodes to retrieve the herb. Astarotte states that the *erbeta* that confers invisibility is not to be confused with the heliotrope: a stone, which produces the same effect just by carrying it on one's person. The

heliotrope's powers were obviously a myth and considered absurd by most, as demonstrated by Boccaccio.¹⁶⁹

The reader later sees that Rinaldo's request is merely a test for Astarotte:

Venne Milusse, e portò l'erba seco
e déttela a Rinaldo in un sacchetto,
e disse: – Dagli Antipodi l'arreo. –
Disse Astarotte: – Dàlla a Ricciardetto. –
Rinaldo guarda, e rimase alfin cieco,
e disse: – Il vero, Astarotte, m'hai detto;
pertanto andianne. – E saltò in su Baiardo,
che questa volta gli parrà gagliardo. (25.210)

Rinaldo's request serves no other function than to prove that Astarotte is capable of conducting the voyage. Opposed to satisfying the magical task of pointless invisibility, Malagigi's offering satisfies a fundamental physical need of the paladins and their horses: thirst.

A comparison of the herbal exchanges in each scene yields telling counterpoints. Malagigi utilizes that which he finds under his feet: the fruit of the earth. Astarotte sends an invisible demon to a distant land. Malagigi's herb relies upon the biological action of ingestion, while Astarotte's requires no such activation: it simply carries and bestows magical powers. Malagigi's nature and offering are much more grounded than Astarotte's in every sense.

3.10 Malagigi as the Poet

At the conclusion of Malagigi's prank in Canto V, Rinaldo and Malagigi have a brief conversation followed by Malagigi's departure. While Malagigi's powers seem so well

¹⁶⁹ In the *Decameron*, Calandrino is made a fool by believing in the magical powers of this stone (*Dec.* 8.3).

defined throughout the entire episode, his departure is baffling. Malagigi, through his magical art, calls his own steed:

E dette molte cose, un corridore
sùbito fece per arte formare,
tanto ch'ognun gli veniva terrore:
ché mentre ragionare altro voliéno,
apparì quivi bianco un palafreno. (5.34.4-8)

.....
Malagigi presto montò sopra quello
e fu da lor come strale sparito. (5.35.5-6)

This shows a lack of discipline on Pulci's part. Malagigi's powers defy the general mood of the scene leading up to this point. With the appearance of his borderline supernatural horse, Malagigi demonstrates his powers as potentially reaching beyond the natural realm. In *Pulci's Morgante*, Constance Jordan declares Malagigi's power to be representative of the poet's artistic license.¹⁷⁰ Jordan states:

The poet himself can then assume the character of a magician and represent his work as a conjuration of an artificial or magical reality that is wholly indistinguishable from reality itself. And in fact it is in the activities of Malagigi that Pulci at first represents the work of an infallible poet.

His achievement is presented theoretically in the image of Malagigi's horse, a creation of the magician's art which functions perfectly in real situations. . . . The magician possesses total control of nature, even its creation, and he is clairvoyant. . . . Malagigi's attributes are properly those of the poet who claims to be infallible and insists that his productions are absolutely true, that is, altogether the subject they represent. (132)

There are other circumstances that seem to draw a stronger bond between Malagigi and the poet. Malagigi's playground of the dark woods in Canto V mirrors Pulci's declaration of his own workshop. Right before the Astarotte episode, Pulci descends into the text to defend himself from detractors: "La mia accademia un tempo o mia ginnasia / è stata

¹⁷⁰ Edoardo Lèbano is very critical of Constance Jordan's work; see "Un decennio di studi pulciani: 1984-1993" 247-50.

volentier ne' miei boschetti," (25.117.1-2). Both Malagigi and the author seem to be at home in this wood, which is the opposite of "arïopaghi."¹⁷¹

Before addressing other links between Malagigi and the author, it would be beneficial to explore a change in Malagigi's power from the *Morgante minore* to *La rotta*. Malagigi's powers, as does much of the poem's style, change from the *Morgante minore* to *La rotta*.

Jordan states:

Pulci does not qualify the powers he assigns Malagigi, and by inference the artist or poet, until canto XXII, where he alters his conception of the magician and invents new limits to his power. These limits are, I think, analogous to those by which he now perceives himself to be restricted. (132-33)

One of the new limits imposed on Malagigi's power in *La rotta* is a reduction of his clairvoyance. In Canto XXI, still within the *Morgante minore*, Malagigi is capable of seeing that Rinaldo is a captive, trapped by way of Creonta's sorcery:

Dunque, e' si reston pur drento al castello
ognun da questo error molto confuso.
Intanto Malagigi lor fratello,
gittando l'arte un giorno come era uso,
vide e conobbe finalmente quello
come Rinaldo suo si sta rinchiuso,
e che questo è per forza di malia;
e subito a Guicciardo lo dicìa. (21.53)

Although Astarotte's main act is just four cantos after the Creonta episode, it does appear in *La rotta*; therefore, Malagigi's powers are under the restraint of new limits. In Canto XXV Malagigi must now ask Astarotte for information regarding Rinaldo's current situation:

E Malagigi rispose: – In qual parte
si ritruovi Rinaldo e Ricciardetto
fa' che tu dica, e d'ogni loro effetto. (25.121.6-8)

¹⁷¹ See intro. to this chapter.

Jordan ultimately concludes: “Although Malagigi’s art remains magical, it is now restricted to those activities which are specifically designated as human and not divine” (134). Canto XXV demonstrates that Malagigi has renounced some of his more supernatural powers, but conceded them to one who has firsthand knowledge of the heavens: Astarotte.

3.11 Marguttino *il gigantino*

There is a scene in Canto XXIV that clearly elucidates the new limits of Malagigi’s craft and concludes by evidencing a bond between Malagigi and the author. Orlando, usually autonomous in combat, asks for Malagigi’s help in disposing of Creonta’s troublesome giants Cattabriga and Fallalbacchio (24.65).¹⁷² These mercenaries were hired by Antea to fight alongside her pagan army (24.58). They smash everything in their path by wielding whale skeletons as their weapons of choice.

Malagigi summons a deformed, grotesque creature named Marguttino to deal with the giants (24.91). Marguttino dances and tumbles around the giants trying to provoke an attack (24.92-93). The scene is overwhelmingly happy and captivates all that are present:

sì che e’ guardava questa meraviglia
l’un campo e l’altro, e ritenea la briglia. (24.93.7-8)
.....
ed a ognun ride a veder questa chiappola,
quantunque ancor non s’intenda trappola. (24.94.7-8)

The giants cannot grab hold of Marguttino as he slides through their legs and escapes their every swipe (24.97). Malagigi conjures a forest and Marguttino leaps in; the giants

¹⁷² When Orlando first spots the giants he wonders if their provenance is natural or demonic: “Questi gigantacci / può far cose sì grande la natura?” (24.65.1-2). Although the giants may seem demonic, they are most certainly a product of nature as subsequently noted by the narrator: “e che natura gli avanzò matera / quando ella fece questa tantafera.” (24.84.7-8). The giants seem to push the limits of nature; however, ultimately Malagigi’s magic is effective in dealing with them as they are bound by the same limits.

angrily give chase and quickly become entangled in the vines and brush (24.97-99). The paladins attack the ensnared giants with spears and lances (24.100). Orlando's squire Terigi rides to the church and grabs a lantern; he returns to light the forest aflame, burning the giants to death as they bellow and moan (24.101-102).¹⁷³

After the two giants are brutally attacked and burned to death, there is a precise declaration of Malagigi's limits as a wizard. The octaves are defensive in tone, as Pulci anticipates criticism:

Chi mi dicessi: «Or qui rispondi un poco:
se Malagigi avea questa arte intera,
potea pur far, come il boschetto, il fuoco
e strugger que' giganti come cera»,
nota che l'arte ha modo e tempo e loco,
ché, se la oppinïon qui fussi vera,
sare' troppo felice un negromante
anzi signor dal Ponente al Levante.

Ma quello Iddio che impera a tutti regi
ha dato termine, ordine e misura,
e non si può passar più là che i fregi,
però che a ogni cosa egli ebbe cura;
e fatture, aüruspi e sortilegi
non posson far quel che non può natura,
e le imagin più oltre son di ghiaccio,
perché e' fe' la potenza nel suo braccio. (24.106-107)

The last line of octave 106 and the first line of octave 107 clearly sustain that there are limits to Malagigi's powers: if he could employ limitless magic he would rule from "Ponente al Levante"; however, God "impera a tutti regi."

¹⁷³ In *L'indole e il riso di Luigi Pulci* Attilio Momigliano comments on the slaughter of the two giants following the lighthearted acrobatic show provided by Marguttino: "Imaginateveli: questa è una delle fantasie più potentemente grottesche del Pulci. . . . In questa digressione l'elemento burlesco è misto al grottesco, il quale si fa palese quando l'astuzia di Malagigi passa in seconda linea, cioè quando della scena si rappresenta piuttosto il lato gigantesco che il diabolico" (220). Malagigi's magic takes a back seat to the comic element of the physical disparity between the scene's participants. The two giants are described as "cerracchioni," or oak trees (24.99.1). Marguttino's characterization is inversely referred to as a "gigantin" (24.98.1). For different interpretations of this episode cf. De Robertis, *Storia del Morgante* 189-90; Getto 104; Puccini 995.

A similar address to the reader as to the limits of Malagigi is found in an octave in Canto XXII.¹⁷⁴ Although these octaves are from the *Morgante minore*, the defensive tone is remarkably similar to that found in Canto XXIV. In Canto XXII Malagigi withholds crucial information from the paladins about preparations by the Saracens; the narrator defends Malagigi's decision:

Questo dich'io; ch'i' so ch'alcun direbbe:
«Quando costoro avevon Malagigi,
d'ogni cosa avvisar gli dovrebbe:
«Così fa il tal; così Carlo in Parigi».
Dunque costui come un iddio sarebbe,
se sapessi d'ognun sempre i vestigi:
i negromanti rade volte fanno
l'arte, e non dicon ciò che sempre sanno. (22.103)

On two occasions Pulci reminds the reader that Malagigi is not a god and, therefore, not able to access powers approximating divine intervention.

A few octaves after the giants' death in Canto XXIV, the narrative voice of Pulci explains why Malagigi enlisted the paladins' help:

Dunque Malagigi e gli altri nigromanti
ci posson cogli spiriti tentare,
ma non poteva uccidere i giganti
per arte, o il fuoco i demòni appiccare;
potea ben fare apparir lor davanti
il bosco, e lor vi potevano entrare
e non entrare: ch'a nessuno è negato
libero arbitrio che da Dio c'è dato. (24.111)

Pulci begins octave 112 in Canto XXIV by continuing the defense of Malagigi's restraint against the giants; however, the octave quickly transitions to an autobiographic apologetic on Pulci's past experimentation with magic:

Potean gli spirti ben portare il fuoco,
ma non poteano accenderne favilla.

¹⁷⁴ This octave is cited by Constance Jordan in her study (133).

Così vo discoprendo a poco a poco
ch'io sono stato al monte di Sibilla,
che mi pareva alcun tempo un bel giuoco:
ancor resta nel cor qualche scintilla
di riveder le tanto incantate acque,
dove già l'ascolan Cecco mi piacque;

e Moco e Scarbo e Marmores, allora,
e l'osso biforcuto che si chiuse
cercavo come fa chi s'innamora:
questo era il mio Parnasso e le mie Muse;
e dicone mia colpa, e so che ancora
convien che al gran Minòs io me ne scuse,
e ricognosca il ver cogli altri erranti,
piromanti, idromanti e geomanti. (24.112-13)

Pulci's defense of Malagigi's restraint transitions rather abruptly to a first-person apologetic.

Pulci is retracting his own transgressions indicated by his enemies, specifically Matteo

Franco's accusations for Pulci's past experimentation with magic.¹⁷⁵ Times have most certainly changed. The Malagigi episodes in *La rotta* have a much more serious tone. This is by no means the same Malagigi that the reader encountered in Canto V, using his magic for trickery.

As the cultural atmosphere of Florence changes, so changes the style used in the *Morgante*. There is a corresponding development in the character of Malagigi from his initial appearance in the *Morgante* to his discourse with Astarotte in Canto XXV. The changes in Malagigi's power may be viewed in correlation with Pulci's changing status in Florence's cultural politics. At first the benevolent wizard is interested in demonstrating his powers through mischief, showing a lack of restraint. Later, in the *La rotta*, the narrative voice states clearly that Malagigi's powers "non posson far quel che non può natura" (24.107.6).

¹⁷⁵ Interestingly, Pulci declares that his experimentation with magic was a "bel giuoco," as opposed to a serious devotion (24.112). See section 2.2 for more on Pulci's past experimentation with magic and Franco's accusations.

Jordan—as noted above—proposes that the creative powers of the poet may be represented in the benevolent wizard; however, Malagigi may represent more than just the creative powers of the poet.

3.12 Malagigi and Astarotte's Colloquy

Before moving forward, a recap of this chapter's fundamental parts is in order. A representation of Marsilio Ficino's religious philosophy is found within Astarotte's discourse in Canto XXV. In contrast to Astarotte is the benevolent and inversely natural Malagigi. Malagigi has also been identified as representative of Pulci in certain respects. The following section examines the interaction between Astarotte and Malagigi in Canto XXV. By looking at the exchange between Malagigi and Astarotte as an exchange between Pulci and Ficino, one hopes to yield a more precise indication of Pulci's view of Ficino's religious thought.

Early in their exchange, Malagigi finds Astarotte's speech rather boring. He implores Astarotte to speak loudly and skip insignificant details while he recounts Rinaldo's adventures in Paganía (25.122.6-8). Astarotte speaks for three hours; Malagigi must interrupt: "Non dir più, ch'i' m'addormento" (25.132.3).

In contrast to Malagigi's initial exasperated tone, Astarotte makes certain theological declarations that cause the wizard to perk up and ask for clarification. It is in the face of these topics that Malagigi, and Pulci for that matter, exhibits doubt. One such topic that strikes Malagigi's interest is Astarotte's declaration that the Father is superior in knowledge to the Son. With regard to the Holy Trinity, Astarotte states:

Dir ti potrei del Testamento vecchio,
e ciò che è stato per lo antecedente;
ma non viene ogni cosa al nostro orecchio,
perch'egli è solo un Primo onnipotente

dove sempre ogni cosa in uno specchio,
il futuro e 'l preterito, è presente:
Colui che tutto fe', sa il tutto solo,
e non sa ogni cosa il suo Figliuolo. (25.136)

Upon Astarotte's declaration of the Father's superiority to the Son, Malagigi abstains from interrupting. Four octaves later, Malagigi, thoroughly confounded, returns to Astarotte's declaration: "– Tu m'hai detto / un punto che mi tien tutto confuso: / che il Figliuol tutto non sappi in effetto" (25.141.1-3). Later in the canto Astarotte conducts a similar discourse on the Trinity with Rinaldo. Astarotte is quick to remind Rinaldo and the reader that Malagigi does not concur: "Io ho queste parole ritratte / ch'io dissi, e forse Malagigi m'appunta" (25.244.1-2).

Subordination of the Son to the Father is a heretical belief that originated with the Fathers of the Greek Church and gained popularity because of the revival of Greek studies and the Neoplatonism championed by Ficino.¹⁷⁶ The Plotinian Neoplatonic trinity was subordinate in nature, with each of the three parts dependent and ultimately inferior to that above. In contrast to subordination, the Christian Trinity is consubstantial: three diverse persons of one God. Ultimately, the second of the three persons of the Christian Trinity took on a human form, whereas those of the Platonic trinity were abstract entities.

Ficino was cautious with these incompatible trinities.¹⁷⁷ Ficino addresses the faulty use of Christian theology by Platonists in the closing of Chapter 22 in the *De Christiana religione*: "Qualunque cosa mirabile che hanno detto riguardo alla mente divina, agli angeli e altri temi concertanti la teologia è manifesto che l'hanno derivata loro" (102). Ficino's cautious and open approach to such theological issues undoubtedly contributes to his

¹⁷⁶ See Lèbano, *Morgante* 908.

¹⁷⁷ For more on Ficino's treatment of Neoplatonic and Christian Trinities see Allen, *Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*; Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 169.

reputation as one of the greatest thinkers of his time.¹⁷⁸ However, it was this same willingness to underscore problematic points in his own thought that made him all the more easy of a target for Pulci.

Reconciling these trinities was one of Ficino's main hurdles in establishing his religious philosophy. It seems as though Ficino only completely undertook a precise explication of the Trinity in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* and epistolary exchanges in the 1490s; Pulci was deceased by that time. When Canto XXV of the *Morgante* was composed, the incompatibility of Christian and Platonic trinities was undoubtedly cause for discussion, although Ficino had probably not yet crafted a precise explanation.

Astarotte mistakenly confounds the Holy Spirit and the Word, or Christ, in octave 152: "Giusto è il Padre e 'l Figliuolo, e giusto il Verbo," (25.152.1). Critics sustain that this is an error on Pulci's part.¹⁷⁹ The error seems overly conspicuous, for even if Pulci was a supposed heretic, he was far from ignorant of such religious terminology and discussion. Pulci considered Ficino's attempt to reconcile Christian and Platonic trinities an impossible task. The confusion demonstrated by Astarotte when speaking on the Trinity was intentional. Pulci demonstrated confusion on the part of Astarotte in the face of such an undertaking.

3.13 The Paradox of Free Will

In addition to sustaining a traditional view with regard to the Christian Trinity, Malagigi questions the compatibility of God's omniscience with free will. He asks Astarotte

¹⁷⁸ See Allen, *Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* 555.

¹⁷⁹ See Ageno, *Morgante* 877; Greco 971; Lèbano, *Morgante* 909; Puccini 1083.

why God would create some individuals knowing they were destined to damnation. In

octaves 148 and 149 Malagigi asks:

Dimmi – rispose Malagigi – ancora,
ché tu mi par’ qualche angelo discreto:
se quel primo Motor ch’ognun adora
cognosceva il mal vostro in suo segreto
e vedeva presente il punto e l’ora,
e’ par che e’ sia qui ingiusto il suo decreto,
e la sua carità qui non sarebbe,
perché creati e dannati v’arebbe

e presciti imperfetti e con peccati;
e tu di’ ch’Egli è giusto e tanto pio,
e non c’è spazio a esservi emendati:
e’ par che partigian si mostri Iddio
degli angioli che son lassù restati,
che cognobbon il ver dal falso e ‘l rio
e se il fine era o tristo o salutifero,
e non seguiron, come voi Lucifero. – (25.148-49)

Malagigi does not challenge the existence of free will. Free will is most definitely sustained in the earlier Marguttino episode with the two giants entering the ultimately fatal wood: “il bosco, e lor vi potevano entrare / e non entrare: ch’a nessuno è negato / libero arbitrio che da Dio c’è dato” (24.111.6-8). Rather, it is Malagigi’s affirmation of free will that causes him to question God’s omniscience.

Astarotte is undoubtedly on the losing end of a carefully planned colloquy. The exchange begins with the discourse on triune subordination; Astarotte concludes by supporting God’s omniscience. Malagigi quickly presents free will as the next topic, which conflicts with Astarotte’s previous conclusion. Astarotte is immediately infuriated as Malagigi, with relatively few words, stalls Astarotte’s discourse (25.150.1). Pulci, and Malagigi, allow Astarotte to speak with little interruption in Canto XXV as he talks himself into a circle of contradiction. Astarotte declares: “Vera e’ la religione cristiana” (25.240.1). However, more doubt results from his disquisition than supporting evidence.

In “The Problem of Free Will in the Renaissance and the Reformation,” Charles Trinkaus declares: “Stated in its broadest terms, the cultural problem of the Renaissance and Reformation, with which the question of free will was directly concerned, was the fact and the consequences of a divorce between ethics and economics, between the moral and the expedient, between the spiritual and the material” (51). While Pulci’s detestation of Ficino’s approach is evident, Pulci’s own personal theological concerns seem to lie within the divisions noted by Trinkaus, demonstrated through the differences between Malagigi and Astarotte.

While describing Rinaldo’s conversion of pagans in India, Astarotte refers to Christianity as Thomas’s religion: “il qual non si voleva battezzare / e ridurre alla fede di Tommaso” (25.129.3-4).¹⁸⁰ Thomas the Apostle needed to touch Jesus’s wounds to believe in his resurrection.¹⁸¹ Pulci’s use of Thomas illuminates a scene of conversion in Canto XXV. The pagan populace needed to see concrete proof to change their beliefs (25.128.7); even if that proof was simply Rinaldo’s superiority in combat versus all non-Christian foes.

The figure of Thomas results in contrast when placed alongside Astarotte. Pulci intentionally chose Thomas to indicate the fundamental differences in the theological discourse at hand, noted by Trinkaus: material versus spiritual. When confronted with new theological affirmations, Pulci wanted concrete proof to establish new doctrine.

¹⁸⁰ Similar lines from Pulci’s *Frottole*, composed contemporaneously in the early 1480s, are the following: “Chi come Tomma palpa / mi par savio e discreto” (2.13-14). Lèbano notes Pulci’s use of the skeptical apostle to refer to Christianity: “It is interesting that the reference to Saint Thomas in Astaroth’s latter periphrasis calls to mind lines 13-14 of Pulci’s *Frottola II*, where it is stated that only he who, like Thomas, needs to touch in order to believe, is to be considered wise and reasonable. . . . Certainly Pulci’s liking for Thomas – for whom the attribute “wise,” also assigned to Astaroth, is used – derives from the inclination to skepticism that the poet shares with the Apostle” (907). The adjective *discreto*, shared by Astarotte in the *Morgante* and Thomas in Pulci’s *Frottola*, is too loosely linked to reveal similarity between Astarotte and Thomas.

¹⁸¹ When thinking of Thomas the Apostle one cannot help but think of Caravaggio’s famous painting *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* c. 1601.

In Canto V Malagigi did not hesitate to use the Lord's name to entice Rinaldo into showing piety and, ultimately, participating in his prank: “– Per la bontà dello Spirito santo / abbi pietà della mia vita rea: / . . . / per quello Iddio che ti può ristorare” (5.23.3-4,8). In *La rotta*, Malagigi demonstrates respect and genuine interest in theological discussion. In Cantos XXIV and XXV Malagigi humbly reduces his powers to the natural realm. In doing so, he reveals fundamental concerns with the Ficinian form of Christianity as well as personal doubts as to God's divine omniscience in the face of free will, a free will that Pulci certainly exercised.

Conclusion

Pulci: “*Frutto fuori stagione*”

Luigi Pulci existed in a unique epoch that saw a thriving humanism, the driving force behind the Italian Renaissance. It is tempting to characterize the Medicean Florence of Cosimo and Lorenzo as maintaining a unitary, monolithic cultural atmosphere. Specifically, there was a difference in the way that popular literature in the vernacular was regarded. Pulci's reputation as a heretic was a result of his spanning these different periods. He was the product of Cosimo's culture operating at the height of Lorenzo's power.

In the early 1460s Pulci made a half-hearted attempt with his *Vocabolista* to fit in humanist circles. With regard to this work Lèbano states:

. . . probably inspired by his desire not to seem out of place in the learned humanist circles of his native city. It is a work filled with classical names and affected diction, inspired by medieval manuals and lexicons and by his reading of the most popular Latin authors (Virgil, Ovid, Livy, and Cicero) and Italian writers (Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio). It was perhaps Pulci's only (and largely unsuccessful) attempt to be included among the Florentine literati. (*Morgante* xiv)

Pulci's attempt was in vain because of a lack of formal preparation and, probably, a general disinterest in humanism.

While a revival of the classics spurred by interest in newly-rediscovered Greek texts was taking place under Cosimo's patronage, there was also an equally strong *cultura popolareggiante*. It was within this subculture of the 1460s that Pulci wrote the first lines of the *Morgante* and assumed a primary role in Lorenzo's youthful *brigata*. In *Il*

Quattrocento e il Cinquecento Riccardo Brusagli paints a picture of this popular culture and its preferred mediums: “È una cultura che ha spesso anche una marcatura politica diversa dalla cultura umanistica: infatti, se l’umanesimo greco e latino trova nei Medici i propri mecenati, la letteratura di gusto ‘popolare’ è quella caratteristica invece delle grandi famiglie magnatizie, che si tengono fedeli a un gusto più tradizionalista. I suoi generi prediletti sono generi umili, spesso legati a destinazioni pratiche immediate: scritture di devozione (preghiere, laudi, vite di santi, sacre rappresentazioni), di immediato intrattenimento (canti di Carnasciale, poesia burlesca o satirica, cantari e romanzi di cavalleria), o di utilità pratica (cronache, poemetti didascalici o di divulgazione scientifica)” (32).

Pulci was undoubtedly one who embodied “immediato intrattenimento.” Through this culture and its oligarchical nature, Pulci made his way into the Medici palace by way of Francesco di Matteo Castellani, a similarly rooted individual. Brusagli further describes the specifically Florentine popular literary traditions:

. . . si possono ricondurre espressioni notevolissime della letteratura fiorentina: i sonetti del Burchiello, che raffinano in surreale *nonsense* la tradizione del versificare ‘alla burchia’. . . la ricca produzione di novelle ‘spicciolate’, cioè sciolte da ogni struttura di ‘libro’ o di cornice . . . le sacre rappresentazioni, ispirate alle Sacre Scritture o alle vite dei santi, e liberamente contaminate di elementi profani, comici o avventurosi; i cantari cavallereschi in ottave . . . (32)

Pulci’s improvisational readings at the table of the Medici, his linguistically mischievous verse, his use of chivalric sources were all part of a particularly Florentine popular culture, a culture *gareggiante* with humanism.

Lorenzo’s Florence saw the rise of Ficino and Neoplatonism, causing many proponents of popular culture to depart Florence and operate in cultural centers much more

welcoming, namely Milan.¹⁸² Popular literature, which once had a proponent in a young Lorenzo, took a back seat to Ficino's Neoplatonism. This was the main cause for Pulci's strife. In "La «Carlias» di Ugolino Verino" Francesco Bausi describes Pulci's *Morgante* and Verino's work as "frutti fuori stagione, irrimediabilmente estranei ai più avanzati orientamenti della cultura laurenziana . . ." (168). As demonstrated in Bausi's study, Verino's work was rooted in Cosimo's Florence of the early 1460s; however, it was finalized and published in Lorenzo's Florence of the early 1480s. Verino's *Carlias* has the same chronological calendar of composition as the *Morgante* and the same polemic tone against Ficino.

It is important to note that Pulci utilized all of the popular culture mediums outlined above by Bruscagli, including the conservatively religious vernacular form permeated by the profane. Combining the sacred and the profane was not uncommon during a period in which anticlericalism was prevalent.¹⁸³ In 1473, religious parody, similar to the one in *Poich'io partii da voi*, was widespread and tolerated.

In addition to Pulci, Franco and even Lorenzo himself composed similar religious parodies. In a *canzone a ballo* entitled *Ragionavasi di sodo* Lorenzo employs a theological allegory that equates the relationship between God and the soul to that of a husband and wife. In *Un caso di «amphibolatio»: La canzone a ballo «Ragionavasi di sodo»* Mario Martelli identifies the allegory employed by Lorenzo as "dichiaratamente sensuale" and "osceno" (310). Many contemporary writings equal in this provocative tone and subject matter circulated Florence without causing a stir.

¹⁸² See Orvieto, *Pulci medievale* 238; "Uno 'scandolo'" 29.

¹⁸³ See Martines "Raging against Priests in Italian Renaissance"; See Corsaro, *Parodia del sacro dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*.

Anticlericalism is seen even from the famously pious Feo Belcari, to whom Lorenzo appealed to solve certain theological doubts.¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, the paradox of free will was one such topic previously questioned by Lorenzo de' Medici. Lorenzo wrote a sonnet to Feo Belcari in which he questions the grace found in God's creation of sin.¹⁸⁵

Bernardo Pulci, Luigi's brother, also wrote anticlerical verse. Despite Bernardo's less than flattering characterization of the Curia, Ficino highlights Bernardo's piousness in an effort to underscore Luigi's deviance.¹⁸⁶ Luigi Pulci used the sacred permeated by the profane as did many: to highlight the transgressions of others.

Pulci dedicated an entire sonnet to the defamation of religious hypocrites that went unmentioned by critics until recently. The tone of *Questi che vanno tanto a San Francesco* is apparent:

Questi che vanno tanto a San Francesco
gabbanti o spigalistri o spigalista,
sanno Quel che l'anime ministra
.....
ché si vergognon di guardare il Cielo,
sappiendo che gli àn fatti mille torti,
.....
Io ce ne vego tanti
et più cie ne sare' per ognun venti.¹⁸⁷

In his other sonnets Pulci was too specific with his targets to go unnoticed.

¹⁸⁴ For Belcari's anticlericalism see Martines "Raging against Priests in Italian Renaissance" 271-72.

¹⁸⁵ The sonnet is the following: "Lo spirito talora, a sé ridotto / e dal mar tempestoso e travagliato / fuggito in porto tranquillo e pacato, / pensando ha dubbio, e vuolne trar costruito // S'egli è ver che da Dio proceda tutto, e senza Lui nulla è, cioè il peccato, / per sua grazia è se ci è concesso e dato / seminar qui per còrre eterno frutto. // Tal grazia in quello sol fa operazione, / che a riceverla è volto e ben disposto: / dunque che cosa è quella ne dispone? // Qual prima sia vorrei mi fussi esposto, / o tal grazia o la buona inclinazione. / Rispondi or tu al dubbio ch'è proposto" (Orvieto, *Tutte le opere* 160).

¹⁸⁶ See section 2.10.

¹⁸⁷ Qtd. fr. Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* 81-82. For the entire sonnet see section 2.8 in note.

The fundamental motive for Pulci's aggression was his intolerance for Ficino's innovative form of Christianity. Pulci states this in the final canto of the *Morgante*: "se pur vane cose un tempo scrissi, / *contra hypocritas tantum, pater, dissi*" (28.43.7-8). Pulci's furor was further compounded as he felt his treasured proximity to Il Magnifico threatened by Ficino and his cultural program.

Pico della Mirandola warned Lorenzo against the perils of the empty mediums employed by the Pulci-led *brigata*: "costoro che hanno preso l'abitudine, non avendo nulla da dire se non inutile e vuoto, di trattenere il lettore con l'apparenza, con varia modulazione e con l'accordo dei suoni . . . a noi che ci preoccupiamo di quel che si scrive, non di come lo si scrive."¹⁸⁸ In the final cantos of the *Morgante* Pulci made an attempt to reestablish the value of popular literature in a new cultural atmosphere that had recently discarded its worth. Pulci stuck to his guns in the final cantos of the *Morgante*, employing simple allegory and a conservative religious tone within the chivalric literary topos of *La rotta di Roncisvalle*. Through an elevated style in *La rotta*, Pulci continues his crusade against his nemesis.

Pulci's *Confessione* is his final pronouncement of religious orthodoxy. In the *Confessione* the *io narratore* explains his encounter with a Seraph who helps the protagonist to see the righteous path after an encounter with a belligerent Cherub (277-82).¹⁸⁹ The wise Seraph advises the protagonist on how to accomplish salvation:

e ritrattar le rime tutte quante

¹⁸⁸ Qtd. fr. Garin, *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento* 811.

¹⁸⁹ The wise Seraph is an allegorical representation of fra Mariano da Genazzano (Carrai, *Le muse dei Pulci* 173). The protagonist of the *Confessione* credits the monastic brother for guiding him away from the aggressive Cherub. The protagonist was already dubious before their encounter; his doubts were at risk of advancing because of the Cherub's comportment and his style (279). The lines are the following: "lo era per sentier dubbioso e angusto, / quando incontro a me fessi un Cherubino / con atto fiero e nel parlar robusto; / tanto che indietro pel primo cammino / mi rivolgea, se nonche mi sovenne / veramente un discreto Serafino" (277-82).

che non dicon secondo lo Evangelio,
 che si vuol venerar le cose sante
 come fe' il nostro Augustino Aürelïo.
 Lascia vostro Parnaso e vostre muse,
 non è tempo a invocar più Palla o Delio,
 non son per te giovanile scuse;
 e però purga la tua contumanzia,
 che le porte del ciel non fien mai chiuse; (298-306)

In *L'indole e il riso di Luigi Pulci* Momigliano questions the sincerity of the *Confessione*: “quella metamorfosi canzonatoria di fra Mariano in un Serafino, che lo induce alla ritrattazione delle sue rime dando un movente esteriore a quella conversione, che dovrebbe nascere da un rivolgimento interno: tutto questo dà alla *Confessione* il tono di una sottilissima ironia contro chi gliel’ha fatta fare” (65-66).¹⁹⁰ Momigliano has trouble finding a sincere tone of conversion because Pulci was not detailing a conversion. He was simply rewriting previous lines that he, and others, recognized as heretical in tone.

Accordingly, Pulci does not retract lines from *Costor che fan* because they are not his; they are Benedetto Dei’s. The opening line of *In principio era buio e buio fia* is the first of Pulci’s scandalous verses to be rewritten in the *Confessione*: “In principio creò la terra e ‘l cielo / Colui che tutto fe’, poi fe’ la luce / e levò delle tenebre il gran velo” (64-66). The Biblical miracles from *Poich’io partii da voi* are also rewritten:

S’io ho della ragion passati segni,
 m’accordo colla Bibbia e col Vangelo, (61-62)

 E come il mar pe’ sua meriti aprì,
 per salvar la sua gente e Faraone
 annegassi e ‘l suo popol, fu così (88-90)

 e Sanson rovinar l’alto edificio,

¹⁹⁰ Many critics who sustain Pulci’s irreligiosity believe the *Confessione* is unconvincing. Momigliano comments on the *Confessione*: “A non voler notare, che le *confessioni* son troppo frequenti a quei tempi per non esser più convenzionali che sincere . . . certe frasi troppo pie e un po’ anche da baciapile” (*L’indole e il riso* 66).

combatter con quel popol filisteo;
 sempre fisso nel cor fu mio giudizio (97-99)

 e come Pietro al dolce richiamo
 sanza guardar più calme che tempesta,
 su l'acque corre, e salta della fusta;
 e come tanti cofan' pieni resta
 di picciol' pesci e il pan che pasce e gusta
 tanto popol affermo e tengo saldo; (189-94)

 Così tutti i misteri principali
 affermo e credo e intendo e veggo e sento
 co' lor' sensi anagogici o morali.
 Lazzaro tratto del tuo monimento,
 quatridüan già fatto in una grotta,
 confesso e col Vangel resto contento (199-204)

 Tanti infermi sanare ch'io non scrivo
 parmi chiar veder, tanti miracoli, (209-10)

The mystery surrounding Pulci's religiosity may not be as unattainable as previously thought. It appears that Pulci's religious itinerary is delineated by his writings. His formation and rise to Medici favor permitted religious parody and anticlericalism, both seen in Pulci's writings against others. The theological discussions of the times and the approach taken by its interlocutors probably instilled a certain skepticism in Pulci's conservative religious beliefs that he had never previously questioned.

Pulci repeated over and over again that he had written his sonnets to underscore the iniquitous ways of others. Pulci attempts to explain and rectify his earlier polemical writings in his letters, the *Confessione*, and the last five cantos of the *Morgante*. With regards to the final five cantos of the *Morgante* Francesco Bausi appropriately states that "sarebbe il caso da prendere alla lettera, e di tenere nella massima considerazione, le professioni di ortodossia, le condanne della magia e i richiami a una fede semplice e schietta (fondata sull'incondizionata adesione alla Scrittura) disseminati nella parte finale del *Morgante*" (168).

Unfortunately for Pulci, the stir that he caused in attacking Ficino was not taken lightly. Ficino's voice seemed to ring just a little louder than Pulci's. Ficino and Franco's claims of Pulci's impiety were immediately reinforced by Savonarola's condemnation of Pulci from the pulpit. The polemic with Ficino adversely effected the reception of the poet and his writings during his life and had a centuries-long lasting effect on Pulci's historical and literary reception after his death.

Appendix

Luigi Pulci Timeline

August 15, 1432: Luigi Pulci is born to Jacopo di Francesco Pulci and Brigida de' Bardi.

August 1451: Luigi declares his family's arduous financial situation in Florence's land register.

By 1459: Luigi is at the service of Francesco di Matteo Castellani.

1461: Luigi begins the *Morgante* under the patronage of Lucrezia Tornabuoni.

Before 1465: Luigi writes the *Vocabolista*.

1464-65: Luigi endures banishment from Florence because of his brother Luca's debt.

February-March, 1466: Similarly motivated banishment from Florence.

1468: Luigi has finished the first 18 cantos of the *Morgante*.

1470: Luca Pulci dies, leaving Luigi and Bernardo much of his debt.

1472: The *Morgante* is completed through Canto XIX.

Late 1472: Pulci is accepted to the Magi guild.

April 18, 1473: Nannina de' Medici writes to her mother Lucrezia confirming that Luigi "divotamente insieme con gli altri s'è comunicato."

August 31, 1473: Luigi writes to Lorenzo: "Tu harai detto ch'io afrettai il partire per non trovarmi coll'academia."

Early Fall 1473: Pulci writes *Poich'io partii da voi*.

September 22, 1473: Luigi sends Lorenzo the sonnet *Sempre la pulcia muor*.

By October 1473: Polemic with Matteo Franco is underway.

By end of 1473: Luigi marries Lucrezia degli Albizzi.

Early 1474: Marsilio Ficino starts a lecture cycle in Florence on the immortality of the soul. Benedetto Dei writes *Costor che fan sì gran disputazione* with Luigi's help.

February 14, 1474: Luigi defensively writes to Lorenzo: "Io t'ò scripta questa colla mano che trema"

Second half of 1473-First half of 1474: Lorenzo writes the *De summo bono*.

September 11, 1474: Ficino writes a letter to Lorenzo entitled “Tempus parce expendendum,” cautioning Lorenzo about the uselessness of empty past times.

October 10, 1474: Lorenzo writes to Ficino declaring their friendship as exceeding all others.

Late 1474-Early 1475: Luigi writes *In principio era buio e buio fia*. Ficino writes letters to Bernardo Pulci and Bernardo Rucellai lamenting Luigi’s behavior.

1475-76: Luigi writes sonnets specifically denigrating Ficino.

January 24, 1476: Franco writes to Lorenzo to complain about Luigi’s suffocating presence in Medici circles.

End of 1476: Ficino writes to Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici asking them to censure Luigi.

January 1, 1477: Ficino writes to Cavalcanti declaring that the Medici have intervened on his behalf against Luigi.

March 10, 1477: Lorenzo sends Luigi to obtain a *condotta* with Roberto Sanseverino.

November 11, 1478: Ercole d’Este writes to an envoy in Florence requesting a copy of the *Morgante*.

1478: The *Morgante* is completed through Canto XXIII

1483: First published edition of the 28-canto version of the *Morgante*.

1483-84: Luigi writes his *Confessione*.

Fall 1484: Luigi passes away outside of Padova, refused burial within the city walls.

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