

TITIAN'S 'ARIOSTO'

BY ROGER E. FRY

IT may be that this is the title by which the magnificent portrait recently acquired for the National Gallery¹ will always be known, but both the words of the title have been called in question. Thus Mr. Herbert Cook would call it Giorgione's 'Barbarigo,' while the majority of critics adhere to the Titian and drop the 'Ariosto.'

First, with regard to its being a portrait of a member of the Barbarigo family. Vasari says that Titian, when he began to follow Giorgione's manner at the age of eighteen, 'made a portrait of a gentleman of the Barbarigo family who was his friend, and this was considered very beautiful, the rendering of the flesh being exact and natural, and the hairs so clearly distinguished that one might count them, as one might also count the stitches in the doublet of silver-embroidered velvet which he painted in that work (*i punti d'un giubone di raso inargentato*). In fine, it was considered so well done, and with such diligence, that if Titian had not signed his name in umber² it would have been taken for a work of Giorgione.' It has been suggested that this description agrees with our 'Ariosto,' and Mr. Cook seems inclined to accept this view, merely disregarding Vasari's statement that though scarcely distinguishable from a Giorgione it was by Titian, and ascribing it frankly to Giorgione himself.

To this identification of the 'Ariosto' with Vasari's account Mr. Claude Phillips had already replied in his 'The Earlier Work of Titian,' that first of all no one, not even Titian, could conceivably have painted this work at the age of eighteen; and, secondly, that the doublet of silver-embroidered velvet, which was evidently a conspicuous part of the painting, has no counterpart in our picture. Even if we

¹ See frontispiece, page 90.

² 'In ombra.' Is not this more likely than the usual translation 'in the shadow'?

admit the danger of arguing as to what a very precocious artist of the Renaissance could or could not have done, the second objection is, I think, final and conclusive.

But the passage quoted bears, nevertheless, upon our picture, since it shows that in certain portraits Titian did approximate so nearly to Giorgione as to be almost indistinguishable to his contemporaries. Now with the majority of Titian's early portraits, with the *Jeune homme au Gant*, the central figure in the Pitti 'Concert,' the Alessandro de' Medici of Hampton Court, there should be no confusion. In these there is a sharpness of accent, an alertness and vivacity, together with a more accented modelling of bony structure which do not belong to Giorgione's accepted portraits. In Giorgione's portraits the movement is slower, more *legato*, the mood more pensive and aloof, they are more 'poesies' and less portraits. There is, moreover, in several of these portraits the peculiarity of a ledge on which the figure leans hand or arm, and in two cases this bears the inscription VV.³ Now in all these points of differentiation between Giorgione's portraits and those of the young Titian our Ariosto agrees with the Giorgione group. It has the ledge, it has at least one V, and it has the slower movement, the less alert look of the eyes, together with the more blunt, more summary modelling which we find in the undisputed Giorgiones. Moreover, it strikes everyone as having in a marked degree that strange sense of aloofness, that strong pervading mood which we associate even more with Giorgione than with the youthful Titian, so that one might suppose that if the inscription were not there we should be inclined to attribute it to Giorgione. But there stands the 'Titianus.' Mr. Cook, allowing the identification of this picture with the Barbarigo described by Vasari,

³ We know nothing as yet of the meaning of the VV, the suggestion that it represents a badly written ZZ for Zorzone may surely be dismissed.

Titian's 'Ariosto'

admits that the signature stood thus in 1544, and supposes that the picture was left unfinished by Giorgione, and that Titian some years later thought himself justified in adding his signature to the two V's which Giorgione had put there. The signature runs thus: TITIANVS TV on the left and a larger V on the right. It has been suggested that the TV on the left is the result of a T being superposed by Titian on an earlier V. But a careful examination shows that this is not the case. The TV was painted at one time as a monogram and by the same hand as did the TITIANVS, and must, I think, stand for Tiziano Vecellio. The other V appears to have been done at another time and in a different manner. It is of course possible—indeed one may say, in view of the other pictures, likely—that there were originally two large V's, but no trace of the second is now discernible.

A further question arises as to the form Titianus; this does not occur elsewhere before the year 1520, and by common consent our picture is of an earlier date. There is however nothing improbable in supposing that Titian, who began by employing the form Ticianus, used Ticianus and Titianus indifferently for some while before finally dropping the former spelling, and that this picture is therefore the earliest known example of a signature which was later on adopted exclusively.

And now as to the painting itself. Though Titian adopted Giorgione's technique so completely, there are slight and subtle distinctions in their methods. Titian's painting is more solid; the modelling was carried further before the glaze was applied; he relied less than Giorgione did upon glaze for actually getting relief and colour-contrast. Now, in the Ariosto the shoulder, the marvellous white shirt, and the still more superb quilted sleeve, all appear to me to have Titian's qualities. For sheer mastery indeed, for the perfect combination of the utmost breadth and

mass, combined with an almost quattrocentist minuteness and precision of detail, this sleeve is unapproachable. If Titian painted only this part of the picture we could scarcely blame him for signing the whole picture as his. The face, on the other hand, seems more thinly painted, a little hotter in its glazes, and in the treatment of the hair it shows less power of massed relief; the touches are drawn more



NO. 1.—Portrait of Ariosto, from the woodcut after Titian in the 1532 edition of 'Orlando Furioso.'

separately, with even more reminiscence of the style of the fifteenth century.

It seems to me, therefore, that Mr. Cook's theory is not altogether impossible. But I should say that in any case the share of Titian, both in the painting and the final fusion of the whole into the precious and rare colour-harmony which we now enjoy, is larger than Mr. Cook suggests.

I have attempted here rather to put the case than to solve the problem. And now

Titian's 'Ariosto'

let us turn to the question of the sitter. There should here be no difficulty in deciding whether it is or is not Ariosto. For we know what Ariosto was like. The best authority is the woodcut reproduced here



No. 2.—Medal by Pastorino de' Pastorini. *Obv.*, bust of Ariosto, with legend LVDOVICVS ARIOST POET. *Rev.*, Bees driven out of their hive by fire, with legend PRO BONO MALVM.

(No. 1) from the edition of 'Orlando Furioso,' published by Francesco Rosso da Valenza at Ferrara in 1532, a copy of which Ariosto presented to Charles V. This, it is generally said, was done from a drawing by Titian, and there can be little doubt that this is the case, so exactly does it agree in style with other woodcuts from Titian's designs. Here, then, is a contemporary portrait of Ariosto by Titian, and the comparison establishes what appear to me fundamental differences between it and our picture. Ariosto's forehead is high, and, one would guess, narrow, certainly somewhat strongly modelled with well-marked, bony structure. His nose is fine, slightly but distinctly aquiline, and with the bone of the bridge well marked; the mouth delicate, somewhat too sensitive and undeveloped as regards the lower jaw. The hair is sparse and wavy. Everything expresses a type of sensitive refinement, nervous and finely chiselled—an elegant man. The picture, on the contrary, shows a man with a broad, unmarked forehead, a nose which protrudes at an angle from the brow, and is the reverse of aquiline, with the bridge quite

unmarked, and a lower jaw inclining to massiveness and somewhat protruding, while the hair hangs almost straight.

The other portraits of Ariosto which we give are taken from medals. The first (No. 2) is that of Pastorino, who worked from about 1548–1578. Since Ariosto died in 1533 it is only traditional, and is indeed probably taken from the Titian woodcut by reversing the direction. It is also somewhat rejuvenated, but it is a finely modelled head, and shows what was recognized a few years after Ariosto's death as a likeness of the poet. In the still later medal by Poggini (No. 3) the type survives, but is weakened, and has already almost lost individual character. But all confirms the essential differences between Ariosto and the subject of our picture. On the other hand it seems to me that these portraits support in a striking manner the correctness of the tradition as regards the other 'Ariosto' of our National Gallery, that attributed to Palma.⁴

⁴ In the rather feeble woodcut on the title-page of the 1531 edition of 'Orlando Furioso,' Ariosto is represented standing in front of two bay trees, a slight indication which tends in the same direction, since it shows the manner in which the poet liked to be represented. From the constant use of his emblems in the woodcuts of these early editions, one gathers that he took an interest in the designs with which they were adorned and, therefore, presumably in this portrait. The emblems on the reverse of the medals were both invented and constantly used by Ariosto. One is a beehive set on fire, the other a hand



No. 3.—Medal by Domenico Poggini. *Obv.*, bust of Ariosto, with legend LVDOVICVS ARIOSTVS. *Rev.*, a hand holding shears which have just cut off the tongue of an adder, with legend PRO BONO MALVM.

with scissors, which have just cut off a viper's tongue. The motto, 'Pro bono malum,' refers to the injuries received from his patron, Cardinal Hippolyto d'Este, in return for the poet's good services. The second, in which the viper loses his tongue, symbolizes rather the vengeance which Ariosto believed his late patron merited. It is elsewhere accompanied by the motto, 'Dilexisti malitiam super benignitatem.'



*"Ariosto", by Titian
Recently acquired by the National Gallery.*