Matteo Maria Boiardo and the Cantari di Rinaldo

One of the distinguishing features of the Orlando innamorato is Boiardo’s sophisticated use of both medieval and classical sources in a poetic form that closely mimics, with false naïveté, late-medieval oral epic tradition. This paradox is perhaps unique to Boiardo’s masterpiece — not even Pulci is as faithful to the medieval cantastorie tradition — and may explain as well why, in the face of altered sixteenth-century standards, the Innamorato quickly fell into disfavor. Today, however, no one should doubt the poet’s erudition and inventiveness. These are two traits which most assuredly transcend sixteenth-century poetic circumscriptions, and to which Ariosto pays certain tribute by his own use of sources in the Furioso. But while Rajna’s monumental study of Ariosto’s sources has permitted critics to delve more deeply into the poet’s intertextuality, much of Boiardo’s poem remains at the first stage of research, and many of his sources still await exposure.¹

Among the books on Boiardo’s shelf, the Cantari di Rinaldo da Monte Albano undoubtedly had an important place.² This long poem, seminal for the Rinaldo tradition at the end of the Quattrocento, recounts its namesake’s struggles with Carlo Magno and the Maganzesi up until his death and popular sanctification. Its structure conforms to the general rules for the amplification of early epic poems as defined by Domenico de Robertis.³ It repeats the same narrative cycle, beginning with an attempt by the Maganzesi to sabotage Rinaldo’s exile, the steps he and others take to defend his cause, and his eventual absolution. The form of the poem as we have it most likely reflects a long period of development through oral performance before finally reaching the written word.
Several circumstances suggest that Boiardo knew the poem, though in what precise form we cannot be sure. It undoubtedly dates from the first half of the Quattrocento, as paleographic analysis of its most important manuscript attests. Scholars are certain only that the poem was known in Tuscany, and unfortunately no evidence certifies its presence in Emilia, or more specifically in Ferrara. Rajna has hypothesized that the first extant edition was published in Naples in 1479, which if true corroborates its widespread diffusion in the peninsula by the last quarter of the century.

While the circumstantial evidence may be scarce, textual evidence in the poem itself supports two hypotheses: that Boiardo had a written copy of at least part of it, and that he was familiar with the Rinaldo tradition as a whole. Neither thesis is particularly surprising. Further, an analysis of those passages in which an intertextual link is most manifest furnishes substantial insight into Boiardo’s approach to writing and the broad fictions on which the poem rests. In simplest terms, his attitude toward the Monte Albano is often in the same spirit of “historical accuracy” that Antonio Franceschetti has pinpointed for the Aspramonte. Through the poet’s precise allusions to his sources the Innamorato becomes a segment in the vaster history of the Carolingian era, the chronicling of which, Boiardo would have us believe, is an ongoing process to which each poet/historian contributes with his own work.

Chronology in itself does not interest Boiardo, however, and it is not his primary motive for alluding to other texts. The poet often subordinates questions of time to other structural interests, and his true purpose in exploiting the tradition becomes clear only when the reader understands Boiardo’s precise methodology. In the case of the Cantari di Rinaldo, the poet relies on his source to highlight, through both analogy and contrast, the characters of Orlando and Ranaldo, often for comical ends, and he discards those elements that fail to fit his scheme. As a result of these changes the two texts become difficult to reconcile: the Cantari’s assertion, for example, that Rinaldo is beatified after his death is difficult to believe in the light of the Innamorato. Nor does any biographical “wholeness” or consistency of characterization appear to interest Boiardo at all. His approach is, in a word, selective, and his selectivity draws on precise notions of the ideology of character and the nature of literature.

What follows is a close examination of two episodes that most strikingly attest to Boiardo’s familiarity with the Cantari and the
tradition they generated. While we cannot know, from the available evidence, the extent of Boiardo’s reading — fragmentary or whole — the episodes do bring us much closer to an understanding of his use of medieval sources, and of his thinking about literature.

The first duel

The signs that send us back immediately to the text of the Cantari di Rinaldo appear in Orlando’s invectives during his great duel with Ranaldo at Albraca (I.xxvi-xxvii). Ranaldo himself unwittingly sparks his cousin’s rage, though in fact he is trying to becalm him. He reminds him of their family ties, which should exclude a priori any possibility of a duel: “Guerra non aggio, / Né voglio aver con teco, il mio cugino. . .” (I.xxvi.60). The use of “il mio cugino” as an appositive and not a vocative underscores the importance of the relationship, and not merely the fact that it exists. Orlando understands at once Ranaldo’s subtle argument:

Rispose il conte ad esso: — Animo vile,
Che ben de chi sei nato hai dimostranza,
Mai non fusti figliol d’Amon gentile,
Ma del falso Genamo de Maganza.” (I.xxvi.61)

The reference is to the initial episode of the Cantari di Rinaldo, which begins precisely with Ginamo’s declaration to Amone that he, Ginamo, is Rinaldo’s true father.

Io te n’ho detto e dirò proprio il vero
e non terrò più la cosa nascosa,
ché gli è passato quindici anni omai
che con tua donna mio volere usai,

e da quel tempo in qua tenuta l’èi
per mia amica, come saper puoi,
e per vero è che io ho avuto di lei
i quattro figli i qual tu tien per tuo;
giuròti in verità che ellin son miei. (I.10-11)

This daring announcement plunges Carlo Magno’s court into crisis. Beatrice, Rinaldo’s mother, denies Ginamo’s accusation, and eventually he pays for his slander with his life, at Rinaldo’s hand. But the parentage question is never resolved, even though
Amone finally does accept Rinaldo as his son.\textsuperscript{10}

In Boiardo's scene, Orlando exploits the uncertainties about Rinaldo's parentage that Ginamo appears to have created. Aware of the lack of absolute proofs, Orlando repeats the accusation, implying by extension Rinaldo's own moral inconsistency, since he too may be a member of the Maganzese clan. Immediately thereafter Orlando returns to the most famous, and most certain, indictment of his cousin:

\begin{quote}
— Oggi hai trovato il brando de iustizia!
Confessa le tue amende tutte quante;
Che sei per fama publico ladrone,
Io vo' che tu 'l confessi, e far ragione.— (I.xxvii.15)
\end{quote}

Here Boiardo is undoubtedly drawing on the widespread commonplace of Rinaldo the thief that a fifteenth-century audience would expect to find in his poem. While the allusion is vague, it is nonetheless true that Rinaldo's figuration as a brigand originates in the French version of the \textit{Cantari di Rinaldo}, passes into Italy most likely in that poem, and then filters into other \textit{cantari} of the Quattrocento.\textsuperscript{11} Rinaldo's response recalls his adversarial relationship with Carlo Magno, which is a constant in the \textit{Cantari di Rinaldo}. Here he extends that position to Orlando, who is often his ally in the earlier poem:

\begin{quote}
— Tu te credi tuttora essere in Franza, —
Disse Randaldo — e gli altri minacciare.
Chi cambia terra, die' cambiare usanza;
Re Carlo quivi non può comandare. (I.xxvii.16)
\end{quote}

The challenge to Charlemagne's authority is, moreover, the ideological basis for much of the action in \textit{Cantari di Rinaldo}. In the fifteenth \textit{cantare}, for example, the emperor wants to hang Rinaldo; the narrator relates:

\begin{quote}
Quando Rinaldo intese Carlo Mano,
gi invér di lui con quel[lo] coltello in mano,
dicendo: "S'io credesse ch'a tua colpa
Gan m'offendesse e' que' di sua amista,
presente disfare'ti d'ossa e [di] polpa." (XV.14-15)
\end{quote}
Carlo retreats and Rinaldo then flees. Such is the case throughout the poem, where Rinaldo continues to challenge, in one way or another, his king’s authority.

To return to the Innamorato: Ranaldo proceeds with accusations against Orlando, which derive from the tradition of the Aspra-monte. Orlando responds with charges of his own regarding his cousin’s past behavior:

Or tu te vanti, e pòi bene aver caro,
De avere occiso il forte re Mambrino;
Ma non sa dir alcun come andò il fatto,
Perché tu pur fuggisti al primo tratto.

Quella battaglia fu molto nascosa
Là dopo il monte, e senza testimonio;
Chi giurarà come andasse la cosa,
E se il tuo Malagise col demonio
Te dette la vittoria sì pomposa?
Ed odito aggio ancora, o ch’io me insonio,
Che il fratel Constantin pur fu ferito
Dopo le spalle, e fu da te tradito. (I.xxvii.20-21)

In these octaves Boiardo’s direct reliance on the Cantari di Rinaldo becomes indisputable, for the knight’s words precisely summarize two stories already told there. Orlando is in fact present at the battle that ends with Mambrino’s death: he fights against him alongside Rinaldo until the latter asks his cousin to leave them alone. The issue, Rinaldo contends, lies between him and Mambrino, because the Christian knight had already killed the Saracen’s brothers, Brunamonte, Chiariello, and Constantino. The duel continues until Rinaldo conceives of a strategy for winning:

Pensollo di menar drieto ad un monte
che era maggiore assai d’un palagio,
per esser con Mambrino a solo a solo,
e per fuggir de’ Saracin lo stuolo.

Mambrin gli andava colla spada addosso;
Rinaldo mostra di temere lui,
a rincularsi indietro tosto è mosso. (XXV.27-78)

Mambrino follows him:

ben lo seguiva, tanto che amendui
für[ono] dietro a quel poggetto soli nati,
Here the battle ends: Rinaldo severs Mambrino’s hands, so silencing his sword, and Mambrino languishes. Rinaldo then removes his enemy’s helmet, because he wants to baptize him. Mambrino, however, refuses to renounce Mohammed, and so Rinaldo, once again merciless, decapitates him. Here then is born the motif of Mambrino’s helmet, which appears in the *innamorato* and is a constant of Rinaldo’s identity.

What is striking, however, is the fidelity with which Boiardo repeats the details of the episode, using Orlando as a narrator. But in making the paladin recount the story, Boiardo is careful to distinguish between Orlando’s own limited point of view and the reality of the story as first told by an omniscient narrator. Rinaldo’s clever flight becomes, according to Orlando, an act of cowardice, and the hidden place behind the hill leaves open the possibility of magical intervention by Malagigi, the only witness. At this point Boiardo finds what I would call his “narrative space,” a fundamental component of his compositional approach. It is that empty space between the “historical reality” and the possible alternative versions of the story, as furnished by the narrative structure of the text itself. The source text breaks down into different partial stories, which different characters witness and can later recount; all these stories taken together constitute the matrix, the text itself, elaborated by an omniscient narrator. Through a process of dissection, which privileges the point of view of a given character (here Orlando) over that of the omniscient narrator, Boiardo exploits his sources, reactivating them as living co-texts and not as flat, dead histories. He subjects them to a critical eye and innovative readings, at once postulating and questioning their validity as “histories” in that grand history that is the Carolingian cycle.

Such an approach is, moreover, wholly consonant with the Quattrocento’s new philological spirit. Boiardo confronts the *Cantari di Rinaldo* with a penetrating eye that could only be possible in an age of triumphant philology. As Garin reminds us, the philologists, “pur rispettosissimi di forme tradizionali, affrontano ogni documento, ogni carta, ogni libro, considerando che, così come si presenta, esso è un fatto umano, una traccia e una risonanza umana, e come tale soggetta a esame e discussione critica.”\(^{13}\) The sacred, indisputable text does not exist for the
humanist, and with this newly permissive spirit Boiardo initiates an implicit, and ironic, discussion of the "fidelity" of his source as a "historical" document. The effect is to lend a startling new vitality to the story, reviving it through a simple gesture of subjectivity, and in turn to rescue it from the depths of literary history to which Humanism most likely had condemned it. The irony grows from Boiardo's knowledge that this is all a fiction, though he accepts his sources as history and subjects them to the same scrutiny that a real historical text might undergo.\(^{14}\)

The discussion grows as well from a far more analytic attitude toward character. For Boiardo character is not necessarily the allegorical personification of a vice or virtue. Rather, the poet chooses to emphasize the unending variety of human behavior, which liquidates once and for all the polarized axes of good and evil so dominant in the medieval source. Thus the game he plays with the source is not limited to felicitous erudition: it is also a metatextual strategy, and the means by which Boiardo distances himself from his source in the same moment that he nears it. In this way he affirms that absolute truths, both in the text and in life, are difficult to grasp; the *Innamorato* itself, in its impulsive and inconsistent treatment of Orlando, gives ample proof of this.\(^{15}\)

The poet's attitude is ultimately a product of the Humanist philosophy of the word. For Boiardo the word has a double function: it is the sign of a subjective reality and the mask for an objective reality that is unknown and unknowable. It is most certainly not endowed with an inherent epistemological truth value. The text of the *Innamorato* incarnates Pulci's ironic rejection of the medieval topos by which God and the word are one and the same. Stripped of its truth value, the word becomes a "fatto umano," literally an artifact, bearer of truth as well as falsehood, and wholly subject to the poet's conscious manipulation.

Boiardo's characters share his selectivity in truth-telling when they begin to narrate. Orlando, citing the duel with Mambrino, forgets that once he had believed the version of the events presented in the *Cantari di Rinaldo*: he neglects to claim that he had proudly recounted the news of Mambrino's death to Carlo Magno, effecting in this way a reconciliation between the emperor and Rinaldo. Equally partial is his "reportage" on the death of Constantino, which takes place in the eleventh *canti* of the *Cantari di Rinaldo*. True, Rinaldo wounded his nemesis "dopo le spalle," an act condemned by the chivalric code.\(^{16}\) But once it is reinserted into the context of the episode, his "cowardice" is
mitigated: the knight had decapitated Constantino while the later was signalling his assassins to kill Amone’s sons. Rinaldo was aware of Constantino’s wickedness because two other characters had alerted him: a vavasor and his daughter, both of whom the Saracen had robbed. Killing Constantino can be laid to vendetta and self-defence, goals of which Orlando could not have be aware because he did not know the history. If it is true that Orlando heard the story the way he retells it (and he says that it was in circulation), then he is a victim of erroneous information. His offhand comment, “odito aggio ancora,” ironically underscores the capacity of the word to distort truth as it passes from one voice to another.

Orlando’s discourse, like Ranaldo’s, is primarily rhetorical, and has two addressees. The first is Ranaldo himself, to whom Orlando directs his diatribe only to further enrage him, and he succeeds in this purpose. The other, more important addressee is the reader, and in this case the knights’ altercation becomes a demagogical meta-discourse, with a double function. On the one hand, it suggests the possibility that the rules of chivalry, already broken by Orlando, have also been broken by Ranaldo, who like Orlando was not particularly faithful to them in the past. A more subtle purpose, however, is to furnish information so that the reader can decide which of the two paladins is truly the greatest. Boiardo centralizes the question in the text of the Innamorato, but calls into evidence different texts by citing episodes that are anterior to his own story. He thus appears to recognize the historical division of the Carolingian tradition into two branches, with Orlando and Rinaldo as the capostipiti, and he seems to want to engage his readers in a discussion of that tradition. The issue of Orlando and Ranaldo’s relative merits thus disguises a deeper issue, that of the merits, both literary and ethical, of the texts and stories with which they are associated.17

In the Innamorato itself the question of relative merit reaches a climax in the second book, when Carlo Magno offers Angelica as a prize to whichever of the two knights most distinguishes himself in the battle against the Saracens (II.xxiii.15-16; this is the Furioso’s point of departure). But it is not decided, here or elsewhere, with arms. In the duel at Albraca, the blows are even; with perfect symmetry Ranaldo answers each of Orlando’s strikes against him. Final judgment falls then to the reader, who will side with Orlando or Ranaldo on the basis of his knowledge of the chivalric code, his familiarity with and preferences within the tradition, and his knowledge of the specific cases cited by the
knights. But at the same time Boiardo, ever the agile gamesman, makes such a judgment virtually impossible. He is far more interested in maintaining the conflict between the two, and not in awarding the trophy to one or the other of the cousins. Thus he intensifies his own plot and further complicates the poem's "ethical" issues, which consist above all in the explosion of the conflict between duty and love. He finds a perfect equilibrium in the posing of unanswerable questions, which allows his poem to reach its great textual length.

Indeed, while absolute judgments escape us, in each individual episode the circumstances tend to reward one knight and condemn the other. At Albraca, two indices suggest wrongdoing by Orlando. First, under love's influence he ignores the family bonds that should prevent him from battling his cousin to the death. Secondly, he bases his decision to eliminate Ranaldo on a completely erroneous motive, the fear that Ranaldo, equally in love, has come to Albraca to steal Angelica from him. In truth, it must be remembered, Ranaldo had come to commit an act of vendetta against Trufaldino, just as he had against Constantino in the Cantari di Rinaldo. Orlando, limited as always in his own point of view, is unaware of this.

The golden chair

The golden chair episode, at Morgana's Treasury, presents certain expository difficulties because the text seems to demand an allegorical reading. However, the starting point for interpretation remains the "historical reality," both intertextual and intratextual. One must first ask why, from among all the booty at his feet, our knight chooses a golden chair. The answer lies in the symbolism, which the poet himself explicates in the poem's first episode, of the golden chair as a seat of power:

Re Carlo Magno con faccia ioconda  
Sopra una sedia d'òr tra' paladini  
Se fu posato alla mensa ritonda:  
Alla sua fronte fòrno e Saracino... (I.i.13)

Given this symbolic value, Rinaldo's action loses its simple value as thievery, and becomes a symbolic challenge to power, or more literally an attempted appropriation of it. This has in itself a rich tradition, again traceable to the Cantari di Rinaldo and often linked
to brigandage. In the thirtieth cantare Rinaldo comes to a joust at a tourney Carlo Magno had organized in order to find a horse as powerful as Baiardo. In exchange for the horse, which would serve the king in his struggle against Rinaldo, he offers the royal crown. Rinaldo arrives riding Baiardo “che ne vien come un rondine ratto,” and lifts the crown from its place:

Alla corona fu giunto di fatto;  
giugnendo, presto colla man la prese,  
poi parlò sì che Carlo ben lo ’ntese,

dicendo: “Carlo, poiché tua persona  
on si diletta di magnificenza,  
ciòè di tener cosi ricca corona,  
Rinaldo, fi’ d’Amon, che è in tua presenza  
porterannela via.” Poscia sprona. (XXX.9-10)

Rinaldo ironically admonishes Carlo not to relinquish symbols of power so easily: he who pretends to possess them should behave in a way consonant with his status. This theme finds echoes in Boiardo’s episode. Orlando answers Ranaldo’s boast with a warning: “Il conte li dicea che era viltate / a girne carco a guisa de somiero” (II.ix.33). The image comically inverts the usual body-chair relationship: Ranaldo does not sit on the throne but carries it on his shoulders, a fairly sure sign that he is unworthy of it, because he is ignorant of its use. The wind that finally prevents his exit from the Treasury will serve allegorically to make this point.

Having heard Orlando’s words, Ranaldo unleashes his anger against his cousin and Carlo Magno:

Disse Ranaldo: — E’ mi ricordo un frate  
Che predicava, et era suo mestiero  
Contar della astinenza la bontate,  
Mostrandola a parole de legiero;  
Ma egli era si panzuto e tanto grasso,  
Che a gran fatica potea trare il passo.

E tu fai nel presente piú né meno  
E drittamente sei quel fratacchione  
Che lodava il degiuno a corpo pieno,  
E sol ne l’oche avea devozione.  
Carlo ti donò sempre senza freno,  
E datti il Papa gran provisione,  
Et hai tante castelle e ville tante,
E sei conte di Brava e sir de Anglante.

Io tengo, poverello! un monte apena,
Ché altro al mondo non ho che Montealbano,
Onde ben spesso non trovo che cena,
S’io non desendo a guadagnarlo al piano;
Quando ventura o qual cosa mi mena,
Et io me aiuto con ciascuna mano,
Perch’io me stimo che ‘l non sia vergogna
Pigliar la robba, quando la bisogna.  (II.ix.33-35)

The first two arguments repeat motives already expressed by Orlando and linked to the rivalry between the paladins. While he was preparing for the duel with Ranaldo at Albraca, Orlando reasoned thus:

Lui amato non m’ha né reverito;
Pur, a sua onta, io son di lui maggiore,
Ché egli è di piccol terra castellano,
Et io son conte e senator romano.19  (I.xxv.55)

During the duel, Orlando responds to Ranaldo: “Ecco un ladrone, / Che è divenuto bon predicatore” (I.xxvi.33). The echoes indicate that the conflict is the same. Once again we are witnessing a struggle for superiority between the two knights, fomented not by Orlando but by Ranaldo, and verbalized through the theme of the hypocrisy of the self-righteous.

Ranaldo’s acrimonious defence includes references to situations that can be traced back to the Cantari di Rinaldo, where the origins of that plebean brigandage, so dear to the cantastorie and to Pulci, are found. In fact the brigandage begins with the need for food, occasioned by exile:

Rinaldo alla sua gente prese a dire:
“Da mangiar non ci è nulla in questo fosso;
sicché per esso ci converrà ire.”
Ricciardetto rispuose: “Ognun sia mosso;
uscìàn da parte che Carlo non sia,
e rechiam vettuvaglia e salmeria,

e poi ci ritorniam nel piú profondo
di questa selva, e li prendiàn riposo.
Rubando, andiàn d’itorno tutto a tondo;
Carlo di noi non averà mai <osso>.”
E così s’accordâr col cor giocondo.
Montò a cavall[lo] ciascuno vigoroso,
uscir[no] invèr di Francia a guadagnare,
a recar vettuvaglia da mangiare;

poi s’imboscavano in quella Dardenna
ch’era una selva grande cento miglia,
adrento sì che ‘non’ dannò una penna
di Carlo Mano ne di sua famiglia. (XVII.17-19)

From these more basic motives, always tied to a challenge of the emperor’s institutional power, Rinaldo and his companions move on to more sophisticated thieveries, singularly intended as acts of contempt. Rinaldo steals the crown, and immediately thereafter Malagigi frees the king of his horse; further booty includes Carlo’s coat of arms and the swords of his twelve knights. Later still the theme of hunger returns: during the siege of Monte Albano (cantari 44 and 45), the survivors are forced to eat all the horses except Baiardo, whose blood they drink to satisfy their hunger. So when Ranaldo says that at times “non trova che cena,” he signals conditions that are already much improved since times of extreme poverty.

Thus Boiardo erects a referential system that points to episodes within the text and outside of it, renewing and intensifying themes that preexist in the tradition. But again the poet is not content with a passive repetition that might bore him and his audience. Orlando’s outrage at Albraca, underlined by his long, self-righteous speech, here disappears. Instead, he falls into a silence so total that his only words are hidden in indirect discourse: “Il conte li dicea che era viltate / A girne carco a guisa de somiero.” In place of Orlando’s fury we find Ranaldo’s rage, and in his angry apology he emphasizes “grabbing Fortune’s forelocks” when opportunity presents itself. But while Ranaldo’s actions attempt to follow the paradigm of the “opportunity knocks but once” school, this allegory abruptly and wilfully ends when it comes crashing up against another one, that of the tempest, as Boiardo’s interest in the comic once again triumphs. It is multi-level comedy, too. Ranaldo’s humorous humiliation is even funnier since he is the aggressor, and because the immaterial wind defeats his avarice for material gods. But that wind is none other than “fortune” itself, not the positive fortune of opportunity, but the negative chaos that easily stymies man’s most valiant efforts, and that Orlando, this time the better knight, has known how
to defeat by grasping Morgana's forelocks and literalizing the metaphor. So the scene becomes, overall, a comic meta-allegory of allegories in conflict, man's ingenuity versus his impotence before nature, with the certain message that the greater knight knows instinctively how to navigate these dangerous waters.20

Ranaldo's mishap in Morgana's Treasury becomes even more humiliating when compared to the greatness of his character in the tradition. Indeed, when the text of the Innamorato is compared to that of the Cantari di Rinaldo, Boiardo's urge to comic irony emerges most clearly as his intertextual strategy. His Ranaldo becomes a caricature of the earlier figuration, in which the knight was seriously involved in struggles for power and survival between himself, Carlo Magno, and the Maganzesi. Ranaldo's self-defence is inadequate in the present situation: the dangers have vanished; Orlando has erased them. And the defeat of a knight who in the Innamorato knows nothing better than force, at the hands of the most immaterial force there is, actuates a hyperbolic travesty whose purpose is, yes, laughter. But it is laughter intensified by the knowledge of Ranaldo's role as knight who in the past was ready to challenge authority, be it allegorical or political, when the cause was just.

All this is apparent in a reading independent of the Cantari di Rinaldo: Ranaldo's humiliation is obvious when compared to the heroism and courage he manifests elsewhere in the story. Indeed, Boiardo's parodic tendencies function along two axes. The first is syntagmatic, inasmuch as characters leap from virtuous behavior to debasement; the second is paradigmatic, as characters reenact in the text episodes from the source.21 The new contribution of the Cantari di Rinaldo consists above all in rendering more explicit the shift in the character's ideology, which reflects the poet's ideology as well. In the Cantari Rinaldo's degraded "criminal" behavior reflects a sorry political situation, and the text makes him a hero. But in the Innamorato, while he exhibits inappropriate behavior in response to what he sees as another unjust social situation, the text in no way endorses him, but instead ridicules him. This shift once again suggests that for Boiardo nothing about his sources is sacred, including their presentation of noble characters. The Innamorato absorbs its sources, exploiting them almost abusively for the text's internal ends. Any reading of the episode that wants to see in Ranaldo a noble hero in the altered social context of fifteenth-century Italy must somehow account for his defeat. If Ranaldo is the spokesman for a new bourgeoisie, he is a spokesman who is not only vanquished,
but silenced. Certainly this augurs poorly both for our exaltation of his "nobility" and of the class he should represent. The only ideology that Boiardo finally endorses here is a textual one, which subordinates consistency of character to the ends of plot and the comic.

While further investigation of these two texts may yield additional points of contact, these episodes alone bring Boiardo's strategies into focus. Taken together, they are complementary; each provides an opportunity for a character to comment implicitly on the figure of Rinaldo as presented in the seminal text. In the first case Orlando offers a negative reading; in the second Rinaldo gives us a sympathetic one. As both characters finally impersonate the reader in the text, so do they reflect the poet as well, as "reader" of the tradition. Their conflict demonstrates the importance of the reader's point of view in actuating interpretation: they both discuss the same text, but present radically divergent conclusions. The Innamorato thus emerges, here as elsewhere, as a poem engaged in a profound investigation of the tradition from which it springs, and which ultimately conquers that tradition by absorbing it into its own structural and thematic architecture. Beneath its humor lies a text in search of solid ideological terrain, even if its most secure assertion is the inevitable ambiguity of the word.

NOTES


2 I cite from I cantari di Rinaldo da Monte Albano, ed. Ezio Melli (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1973), hereafter "Cantari di Rinaldo" or simply "Cantari." I am using this text as the only modern edition available, even though
we cannot know whether Boiardo had a similar version or mere fragments of it, although the textual evidence leaves little doubt that his knowledge of the poem was in a written form. Nor do we know by what title he knew the poem: 1491 is the earliest date for the Renaissance misnomer Innamoramento di Rinaldo di Montalbano, in which Rinaldo’s love story occupies fewer than two cantari in 51. In the Cantari the character’s name is “Rinaldo,” while in the Innamorato the spelling changes: from an initial “Rainaldo” (book I, canto 1) it is fixed finally as “Ranaldo.” In order to be faithful to Boiardo, who has already suffered too many attempts to Tuscanize his language, I use “Ranaldo” when speaking about the Innamorato, and “Rinaldo” when discussing the Cantari.

3 “Il mestiere aveva il sopravvento sull’immaginazione, o ne era il surrogato; alla varietà degli oggetti faceva riscontro una notevole povertà di mezzi, una limitata libertà tecnica. L’innovazione è per lo più d’ordine amplificativo, o sostitutivo (sostituzione di topoi, sia nell’ordine narrativo sia in quello formale): i testi si trasformano per continue sovrapposizioni e proliferazioni; o, nell’ambito più ristretto d’un’soluzione retorica, finiscono col girare su se stessi, con ritorno a distanza, le formule aiutando, perfino sulle posizioni di partenza”: Domenico De Robertis, “Problemi di metodo dell’edizione dei cantari,” in Editi e vari: Studi sulla tradizione letteraria tra Tre e Cinquecento (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 93-94.

4 Among the Italian manuscripts the most important are the Palatino 364 at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, which is the textual basis for Melli’s edition, and a fragment of 509 octaves, Cod. Riccardiano 683. Fifteen printed editions survive, as well as notices about two others, Venezia 1491 and Milano 1510, which are lost. See Melli’s introduction, XXIV-XXXIX. Melli has also identified fragments of a lost manuscript that Lionardo Salvati studied in preparation of the first edition of the Vocabolario della Crusca: see “Estratti di un perduto codice del ‘Rinaldo da Montalbano’ in un manoscritto autografo di Lionardo Salvati,” in Convivium, n.s. III, XXIX (1961), 326-34. On the rich French tradition, both in prose and in verse, see Melli’s introduction, vii-xxiii, and also “Rapporti fra le versioni rimate del Renaut de Montaube” and the Rinaldo in versi del manoscritto Palatino 364,” in GSLI, CXLI (1964), 369-89, and “I Cantari di Rinaldo e l’epica francese,” in Atti dell’Accademia delle Scienze dell’Istituto di Bologna, Classe di scienze morali, anno 64o, Reniicioti, LVIII (1969-70), 102-56. Three studies by Pio Rajna should be remembered: “Rinaldo da Montalbano,” in Il Propugnatore, III (1870), pt. I, 213-41; pt. II, 58-127 (but see also Melli’s corrections in his GSLI article); “Due frammenti di romanzi cavallereschi,” in Rivieta di filologia romanza, I (1882), 163-78; “Frammenti di un’edizione sconosciuta del Rinaldo da Montalbano in ottava rima,” in La Bibliofilia, IX (1907), 132-49. Rajna was the first to hypothesize the existence of a Franco-Italian version of the poem, which would have been lost; Florence Callu-Turiaf offers proof of its existence in “Notes sur une version disparue de la chanson de ‘Renaud de Montaube’ en franco-italien,” Le Moyen Age, LXVIII (1962), 125-36.

5 The catalogues that I consulted are the three published by Bertoni in La biblioteca estense e la coltura ferrarese ai tempi del Duca Ercole I (Torino: Loescher, 1903); they index the libraries of Borso d’Este (1487), Ercole I (1495), and Eleonora d’Aragona. Although he gives no proof whatsoever, Bertoni names the Rinaldo da Montalbano among the popular romances at Ferrara. The other published lists (which I consulted as well) are: that of the books of Nicolò III, published in part by Rajna in “Ricordi di codici francesi posseduti dagli Estensi nel secolo XV,” in Romania, II (1873), 49-58, and completely by Adriano Cappelli, “La biblioteca estense nella prima metà del secolo XV,” in GSLI, XIV (1889), 1-30; and a list from 1480 that Luigi Napoleone Cittadella published in his Il castello di Ferrara (Ferrara: Taddei, 1875). A French edition of the poem is recorded in Mantova in 1407. See the inventory published by Willemo Braghiroli, Paul Meyer and Gaston Paris, “Inventaire des Manuscrits en langue française possédé par Francesco Gonzaga
I, capitaine de Mantoue, mort en 1407,” in Romania, IX (1880), 497-514. The codex is today at the Marciana in Venice, ms. fr. XVI.


7 Franceschetti, “L’Orlando innamorato . . . ,” cit., p. 230. Boiardo’s historicism is limited, however, and he does not hesitate to change history if it will be useful to his ends. For example, he reincarnates Viviano, Malagigi’s brother, even though he had died early in the Cantari di Rinaldo.

8 The poet exploits the possibility of entertaining the reader by introducing chronological interruptions that the "entrelacement" facilitates. At I.xix.21, for example, Orlando meets a knight, a young girl, and three giants. The knight is Brandimarte, the girl Leodilla; but Brandimarte does not meet the giants until I.xx.10. At II.xv.58, Ranaldo arrives at Mambrino’s fountain, drinks the water, sees Angelica and falls in love with her; but Angelica does not arrive there until II.xx.44. In both cases Boiardo profits from anonymity and suspension to keep his reader’s attention; the rhetorical strategy triumphs over the temporal demands of the story. In addition there is the herculean task of generating any meaningful chronology between the stories told in the Cantari and those of the Innamorato. While the events of the latter poem could be nested among the Cantari, this sort of effort would have little value, and seems to be irrelevant to those poets who make new contributions to the tradition.

9 I cite from the Orlando innamorato, ed. Aldo Scaglione (Torino: UTET, 1979).

10 The omniscient narrator of the Cantari di Rinaldo never appears to doubt Rinaldo’s parentage; he consistently refers to the knight as “figliuol d’Amone.” Still, in having Orlando repeat the accusation, Boiardo implies its potential validity in the epic world of Carlo Magno.

11 See Pettinelli, “L’Orlando innamorato e la tradizione cavalleresca in ottave. I. Rafronti di personaggi e situazioni,” cit. She finds passing references to Rinaldo’s thievishness in the Innamoramento di Carlo Magno, in the Orlando Hiibscher, and finally in the Altobello. Pettinelli’s catalogue is incomplete, however, because of the inexplicable absence of the Cantari di Rinaldo, whose stories of thievishness are most likely seminal for those poems that she has studied. I would add that the same accusation is found two other times in the course of this episode: at I.xxviii.33 (“Orlando gli diceva: — Ecco un ladrone. . . .”) and at I.xxviii.19 (“Ché tu sei ladro; et io son cavaliere . . .”).

12 Franceschetti, L’Orlando innamorato, cit., pp. 233-36. It seems that Ranaldo is capable of the same inaccuracy already identified in Orlando. With regard to the accusation about Balante’s death (I.xxviii.11), Franceschetti notes: “Va in ogni modo sottolineato lo sforzo di Ranaldo di far ricadere sul cujus la colpa di avvenimenti in cui egli in realtà non ebbe alcuna parte (si notino in particolare il quarto e quinto verso di quell’ottava): a proposito di questi fatti il romanzo [Andrea da Barberino’s Aspramonte] cita Orlando solo una volta, e il poema non lo nomina affatto” (p. 236).


14 Boiardo activates this irony through his continual references to Turpino. His treatment of Turpino is outside of the scope of this study, though it certainly merits greater attention. Boiardo undermines Turpino’s supposed authority by citing his hyperbole. Here is the narrator talking about an elephant’s feet:

Dice Turpin che ciascuna era grossa,
Come è ne un busto d’omo a la centura.
Io non ho prova che chiarir vi possa,
Perché io non presi alora la misura.

This example is particularly telling, because the narrator himself keeps a critical distance from his source, thus indirectly affirming the unreliability of “history.”

15 On Orlando’s inconsistency see Elissa Weaver, “Orlando imperterrita, intimidito, dignitoso, rozzo e la varietà del verziere di Matteo Maria Boiardo,” in Annali d’Italianistica, I (1983), 144-49.
Moreover Ranaldo was a guest in Constantino’s palace, which the Saracen had stolen from the vavasor. From this detail as well Orlando could have drawn his accusation of betrayal.

Contemporary readers, accepting the invitation, debated the question of Ranaldo or Orlando’s superiority. Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier document a lively argument between Isabella d’Este Gonzaga and Galeazzo Visconti on the superiority of Orlando or Ranaldo; Bernardo Bellincioni was also involved and wrote three sonnets on the subject. See Luzio and Renier, “Delle relazioni di Isabella d’Este Gonzaga con Ludovico e Beatrice Sforza,” in Archivio storico lombardo, XVII (1890), pp. 99-107.

In addition a golden chair is furnished to all 32 of the kings present at Aragamante’s war council: see II.i.33.

I cite as well the first half of the octave (I.xxv.55), since it contains a reference, though somewhat generic, to the stories of the Cantari:

Sempre a mia possa l’aggio favorito
Nella gran corte de lo imperatore;
E mille volte che è stato bandito,
L’ho ritornato in grazia al mio seignore.

In many episodes in the Cantari Orlando tries to help his cousin. In cantare I he sends a messenger to Beatrice to alert her of the trouble at court that Ginamo has provoked. In IV he aids Rinaldo against attacks by Gano. In XXV Orlando arranges a reconciliation, albeit temporary, between Rinaldo and Carlo Magno, when he proudly announces Mambrino’s death to the king. And in XLII Orlando tries in vain to convince Carlo Magno to make peace with Rinaldo.


See Weaver, cit.