1
Boiardo's Narrator

Ma voi ch'avete gl'intelletti sani,
Mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
Sotto queste coperte alte e profonde.

But you whose intellects are sane and well,
Look at the teaching which is here concealed
Beneath these lofty and profound covers.

(1.25.1)[1]

When Francesco Berni translated Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* into the Florentine dialect, he did not hesitate to add his own asides, as in the case of the address to discerning readers quoted above. This appeal for a serious, allegorical reading may startle us for two reasons. First of all, it constitutes a conspicuous appropriation from Dante's *Inferno:*

"O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani,
mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
sotto 'l velame delli versi strani."

"O you whose intellects are sane and well,
Look at the teaching which is here concealed
Under the unfamiliar veil of verses."

(IX. 61–63)[2]

Berni is thereby suggesting that we read Boiardo's chivalric romance in the same manner Dante advised readers to interpret his theological epic. The second surprising aspect of this passage is its ap-

parent complete incongruity with the narrative voice of the original *Innamorato*. Indeed, if the poem does contain a serious intent, Boiardo's narrator seems to be trying his best to keep it from the reader by stating so incessantly that the sole object of the poem is to delight.[3] We could even say that the narrator has for the most part succeeded, since most critical studies of the *Innamorato* have taken the narrator's statements at face value, and consequently have generally "agreed" with the narrator that the poem harbors no ulterior meaning beyond delectation. Typical in this respect is the following comment by Franceschetti: "The *Innamorato* is not a poem that tries to teach or show anything to its public: it aims only to delight.[4] Indeed, some critics use the narrator's statements as evidence that the *Innamorato* is meant to be, as Robert Durling puts it, "pure entertainment."[5] Only a handful of critics seem to think that Boiardo's audience could have had something to learn from the poem. To complicate matters, the narrator makes a second claim, one which regards not so much the purpose of the book as its subject, love. He provides an all-embracing view of love as positive in all of its manifestations. On this score, as I indicated above, critics have reached little agreement.

Since I am maintaining that the poem adheres to the Horatian adage of *dulce* and *utile*, and that a large part of the *utile* is an ethics of desire, then I must first of all come to terms with the narrator's own claims to the contrary on both these scores. My view is that Boiardo's narrator is an ironist, and, in the following pages, I hope to show that his use of irony is extensive, and that our perception of it is critical to an understanding of the poem.[6] Even when Boiardo is at his most lyrical, his comments can harbor an ironic smile. In this case, the ironic effect is actually heightened by the lyricism of the verse. Further, some of the narrator's most double-edged asides to the reader are set down in conjunction with overtly allegorical episodes, indicating that ironic comments and allegorical narrative do in fact mix. In this section, I will deal principally with the irony of the narrator's statements regarding love; yet, as the narrator's two claims are inextricably related, the analysis will at the same time put into doubt his affirmation of the poem's purely pleasure-giving intent.

Turning, then, to the comments on love, we find the *Innamorato* narrator at perhaps his crafty best in a passage that is generally understood as a tribute to Antonia Caprara, the beloved of Boiardo's earlier collection of poems in *Amorum Libri*:

> Luce de gli occhi miei, spirto del core,
> Per cui cantar suolea sì dolcemente

Rime legiadre e bei versi d'amore
Spirami aiuto alla istoria presente.
Tu sola al canto mio facesti onore,
Quando di te parlai primeramente,
Perché a qualunche che di te ragiona,
Amor la voce e l'intelletto dona.

Light of my eyes, soul of my heart,
For whom I once so sweetly sang
Fair verses, splendid poems of love,
Inspire me for this story now.
Through you, my song had earned esteem
When—earlier—you were my theme,
For Love grants voice and judgment to
Those who devote discourse to you.

(2.4.1)

Durling writes that in this passage Boiardo offers a conventionalized picture of himself as a lover who has been serving the same lady faithfully for several years.[7] Yet, if this is so, why does the narrator use the past tense when evoking this love? The past tense would correspond to the historical fact that the *Amorum Libri* was completed long before the composition of these verses.[8] But this begs another queston: if Antonia Caprara belongs to the past and not to the present, why does the narrator call on her for inspiration at just this point? Although he sometimes acknowledges God's help in composing his poem,[9] this is the only time that the woman of the *Amorum Libri* is called on to inspire the *Innamorato* narrative. We can begin to find the key to this passage by examining the narrative events surrounding it.

First of all, we need to remember that the reference to Antonia comes in the wake of the theme of female perfidy developed in the preceding cantos. Angelica had sent Orlando to certain death (or so she thought) in the garden of Orgagna so that she could be free to seduce Ranaldo (1.28). One may note that although she is portrayed on other occasions as a likeable character, Angelica probably has her worst moment here as she orchestrates Orlando's death. This deceitful act serves to set the scene for the very incarnation of female perfidy, Origille. Orlando, on his way to Orgagna, finds this character hanging by her hair as a Dantesque *contrappasso* for having tormented lovers by throwing her promises to the wind: "Come al vento si volge per se stessa, / Cosí sempre rivolse ogni promessa" (The way she now turns in the breeze, / She used to twist her promises! 1.29.2).

One of the victims of her subterfuge, who now stands guard over her punishment, tells Orlando about the multiple betrayals to which she had subjected her suitors. Heedless of the warning, Orlando frees her and then falls madly in love with her, soon becoming yet another of her victims when she tricks him and steals his horse (1.29). Just prior to the reference to Antonia, Orlando meets up once more with Origille (2.3), who has, by the way, already taken another lover, and he is again inflamed with passion. It is at this point that we have the reference to Antonia (2.4), which is immediately followed by Origille's betrayal of Orlando for the second (but not last) time: after having contemplated killing him in his sleep, she runs off with his horse once more and now also his sword, thus depriving him of two essential symbols of knighthood.

What does Antonia Caprara have to do with Angelica at her worst moment and her intrinsically evil alter-ego Origille? If we heed the *Amorum Libri*, plenty. After an initial period of bliss in which the poet's love is reciprocated, Antonia betrays him by finding a new lover and together they mock him (XCVIII). The poet suspects that the lady was leading him on all along: "Che finte erano allor tue parolette, / Finta la voce e finto il dolce suspetto" (that then your gentle words were merely feigned, / as were your tone of voice and charming ways, LXXI). He laments his inability to stop loving this false and shallow female despite the betrayal:

> Alma fallita e stolta,
> Che segui, ed hai seguito
> Chi t'ha tradito
> Sempre in falsa vista.
>
> Deceived and foolish soul,
> that chased, and still now chase,
> the one that has betrayed
> with false appearances.
>
> (LXXI)

Antonia Caprara, then, who "a la promessa fede ha dato volta" (overturned her promise of fidelity, CIV), is not a faithful muse but rather a living prototype for the treacheries of Angelica and Origille. But that is not the extent of the irony. The *istoria presente* that she is now called on to inspire involves Orlando's rout with three deadly enchantresses in the garden of Orgagna. These monstrous creatures are allegorizations of the type of woman already encountered out-

side the garden, for they attempt to seduce the knight and then kill him. Orlando first meets a siren who tries to lull him to sleep with her song, then a harpy who wants to blind him with the steam from her eyes, and finally a fawn who lurks behind a table of food meant to stir up his appetite. The allegory in this episode, which will be examined further in chapter 10, is so overt that it is hard to miss or even misread. We then have to ask ourselves in what fashion Antonia is called on to provide the inspiration for the plot. Although his intention is partly concealed by the lyric tone of the passage, the narrator is really asking Antonia to inspire an episode in which Orlando is about to kill three monstrous but unmistakable impersonations of her.[10] In this way, the character Orlando would be taking revenge on the type of woman exemplified by Antonia Caprara in a way that the poet of the *Amorum Libri* was unable to do. Thus, the evocation is inevitably ironic.[11] As Dennis H. Green notes, conveying derision through what appears to be praise was the most common function of irony in the traditional rhetoric of medieval courtly society, where direct criticism of others was easily avoided by saying the opposite of what was meant.[12]

Once we recognize the irony of this supposed tribute, we are better prepared to interpret the very next verses of the poem, which are again set in a lyric mode and are perhaps the lines most often quoted as evidence of Boiardo's unconditionally positive view of love:

> Amor primo trovò le rime e' versi,
> I suoni, i canti ed ogni melodia;
> E genti istrane e populi dispersi
> Congionse Amore in dolce compagnia.
> Il diletto e il piacer serian sumersi,
> Dove Amor non avesse signoria;
> Odio crudele e dispietata guerra,
> Se Amor non fusse, avrian tutta la terra.
> Lui pone l'avarizia e l'ira in bando,
> E il core accresce alle animose imprese,
> Né tante prove più mai fece Orlando,
> Quante nel tempo che de amor se accese.
>
> Love [was first to find] rhymes and lines,
> All sounds, all songs, all cadences.
> Love linked in cordial company
> Dwellers in distant boundaries.
> Delight and pleasure would be lost
> If Love were not the sovereign lord;

Ungentle hate and heartless war,
If Love were not, would rule the world.
Love outlaws avarice and wrath;
Love lets the heart confront bold tasks.
Orlando wrought more wonders in
That season when Love kindled him.

(2.4.2–3)

The narrator hails love unconditionally as the greatest thing on earth—unifying peoples, bringing about peace, keeping anger at bay. While some critics have tried to fit the narrative so that it supports the claim, many others have noted a contradiction between the narrator's wholly positive comments and the sometimes disastrous effects of love in the course of the narrative—i.e., that of creating wars, giving rise to anger, and breaking up familial ties.[13] Among the latter group, there is little general agreement as to the reasons for such apparently blatent contradiction between comment and narrative. The apparent incongruity can be cleared up, however, once we see the intended irony of the passage. First of all, Orlando's deeds need to be seen in context: Orlando's success in this episode stems not from serving *eros,* but rather from putting reason before *eros* first outside the gates of the garden when he maintains his chastity although inflamed with desire for Origille, and then later inside the garden when he overcomes the allegorical representations of female seduction that sought his death.

One could perhaps argue that this and other proems are in a lyrical vein set apart from the rest of the poem and therefore not dependent on the narrative for confirmation or refutal. If this were true, the contradiction between comment and narrative would not be due to irony but rather to two different visions belonging to the lyric and to the narrative modes. Yet this passage cannot be that easily separated from the rest of the poem. On the contrary, an informed reading of this passage gives us a major clue to the poem's dual vision of love. What we have here is nothing less than a presentation of the double Venus tradition. The way Boiardo pulls it off is by echoing this famous passage:

> . . . all this harmonious order of things is achieved by love which rules the earth and the seas, and commands the heavens. But if love should slack the reins, all that is now joined in mutual love would wage continual war, and strive to tear apart the world which is now sustained in friendly concord by beautiful motion. Love binds together people

> joined by a sacred bond; love binds sacred marriages by chaste affections; love makes the laws which join true friends.[14]

The similarity of these two passages has never been mentioned in Boiardo studies, and yet the above description of love from *The Consolation of Philosophy*, an essential text of the Humanist canon, was familiar enough to Boiardo and his early readers.[15] In the passage, Lady Philosophy establishes a cosmic love which creates harmony throughout the universe and without which caos would reign. This cosmic force, when extended to a human level, leads to a harmonious coexistence among peoples. On an individual level, this same cosmic force informs friendship and marital love. Lady Philosophy immediately goes on to address the human race at large: "O how happy the human race would be, if that love which rules the heavens ruled also your souls!" Her words seem to indicate that a love in harmony with cosmic love (such as friendship and marriage) provides a stark contrast to an (unnamed) love which must lead to the very opposite consequences.

The *Innamorato* passage is congruent with Boethius's description on a cosmic and human level. It is only when we arrive at an account of love at the individual level that we are surprised by an ironic twist: Boiardo's narrator, following Boethius, would be expected to praise the love expressed in marriage and friendship. Instead, he switches to a reminder of Orlando's mad desire. We have to laugh when we remember the context of these verses: Orlando's earlier jealous passion for Angelica led him to try to kill his cousin Ranaldo, and yet, at the time of these verses, Orlando has forgotten all about Angelica with whom he was supposed to be so much in love and is instead inflamed with desire for Origille, who likewise betrays him and who also would gladly kill him. Furthermore, he will have to renounce even his desire for Origille in order to survive the adventure.

If we use Boethius's passage on cosmic love as an interpretive key, we find a coherence in the *Innamorato* between the above-cited verses and the narrative sequences. As later chapters will show, the cosmic love of harmony finds its analogue on an individual level through friendship (e.g., Orlando and Brandimarte; Ranaldo, Prasildo, and Iroldo) and the love that leads to marriage (e.g., Tisbina and Prasildo, Brandimarte and Fiordelisa, Rugiero and Bradamante). The negative love, on the other hand, while experienced by various characters, is most consistently acted out by Orlando.

This exposition of the two types of love need not be taken directly

from Boethius, since it is part of the double Venus tradition common to medieval and Renaissance literature.[16] Commentaries pointed to its origin in Ovid's notion of the twin loves. In the *Fasti,* Venus is a cosmic force that rules over earth, sea, and sky, and, furthermore, inspires Ovid's poetry.[17] And in contraposition to the lascivious Venus of the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria*, this good Venus also hallows the bond of marriage. Boccaccio could have been another source of this passage, and one, in fact, finds an echo of Boethius's passage in Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (11.5), where a discussion of the harmonizing power in friendship and love ends abruptly with the comment that enough had been said elsewhere of concupiscible love. Whether Boiardo actually had in mind Boethius, or his two favorite models, Ovid and Boccaccio, or yet another author, his verses on love make perfect sense if they are understood as a description of the good Venus, which is immediately followed by an ironic reminder of Orlando's vain love.[18]

The *Innamorato* narrator evokes the concept of the double Venus directly eight cantos later in an invocation to Venus and Mars: "Stella de amor, che 'l terzo cel governi, / E tu, quinto splendor sì rubicondo" (Planet of love, the third sphere's guide, / And you, fifth shining light, so bright, 2.12.1). Initially, we are not sure how to interpret these references to Mars and Venus since, as Victoria Kirkham has shown, in the art and literature of the period this union could signal either senseless wrath and unbridled sensuality or matrimonial union.[19] For some, the conjunction of Mars and Venus symbolized the harmonizing forces in the universe which subdued the warlike instincts in mankind (v. Boethius). Others used the pair to show that irrational love excited the irascible appetite and led men to war. In order to understand the invocation in context, we have to see what is happening in the surrounding narrative. It cannot be a coincidence that this particular passage introduces Origille's third and final betrayal of Orlando (2.12.5). In the larger context, it shows Orlando heading back to Albraca to tell Angelica he sucessfully completed his mission in Orgagna where she, as the reader knows, had only sent him to die. Its position thus alerts us to possible affinities with the invocation to Antonia Caprara discussed above, which immediately preceded Origille's second betrayal and Orlando's entry into Orgagna. As in the earlier hymn to the power of love, here Boiardo seems to be evoking both the good and the bad Venus and letting the reader judge the distance between them.

While the reader may be still wondering which Venus and Mars are going to inform the canto which follows this evocation, the narra-

tor makes his second and final reference to Antonia Caprara. In the passage cited earlier, a negative inversion of an apparent tribute was to be found in-between the lines. In this second reference to her, the criticism will emerge in the lines themselves as the narrator makes statements and then contradicts them in almost the same breath. The narrator first tells us that his comment on women's lack of fidelity stems from his experience with Antonia: "Come sa dir chi n'ha fatto la prova, / Poca fermezza in donna se ritrova" (As one who's dealt with them can say, / Women have little constancy, 2.12.3). This remark clearly characterizes the beloved described in the *Amorum Libri*, and critics have rightly taken this as a reference to her. Yet in the very next stanza the narrator, repenting of his harsh words on women occasioned by the inconstancy of Antonia, actually reverses his statement by saying: "Ed io, per quella che ha il mio core in pegno, / Cheggio mercede a tutte l'altre e pace" (And I, for her who holds my heart, / Ask mercy from the rest, and peace, 2.12.4). Antonia is now the reason the narrator seeks pardon from the rest. This sudden reversal just does not make any sense. Or at least it does not make sense if we take it at face value. But this new attitude of the narrator sounds familiar, and this time he is not quoting Boethius but his own character Orlando. Some cantos earlier, Orlando first bitterly complained about Origille's first betrayal. Then he immediately corrected himself stating that because of Angelica's goodness, all women were worthy of love: "Che per lei sola e per la sua bontate / L'altre son degne d'esser tutte amate" (Her goodness, her example prove / That other women merit love, 2.3.47). The reader, however, knows better, remembering that Angelica betrayed Orlando even before Origille did. By temporarily fashioning himself as a second Orlando, the narrator makes it hard for the reader to take what he says seriously.

This technique of contradictory statements is employed in the same passage when the narrator talks about women and love in general. He would first have us believe that love in the past was worthy of praise, but that now it is to be lamented principally because women of the present are false. Yet he completely reverses that statement in the following octave when he claims that his prior criticism of women's falsity applied only to those of the past: "E ciò che sopra ne' miei versi dico, / Per quelle intendo sol dal tempo antico" (What I said in my rhymes before / I only meant for those of yore! 2.12.4). It is in the midst of this dizzying display of double-talk that one must interpret the call to Venus and Mars as either positive or negative. Yet the reader is given no time to ponder such duplicity:

the sentence the narrator began in the fourth stanza does not end until the last line of stanza 5 when he has already told of Origille's final betrayal of Orlando (one which could cost him his life).

When the narrator evokes the celestial Venus one last time in the poem, it is also for ironic effect. The harmonious call—"O soprana Virtù, che e' sotto al sole, / Movendo il terzo celo a gire intorno" (O Power, beneath the sun supreme, / Who guides the sky's third circling sphere, 2.21.1)—comes at a time when Orlando and Ranaldo are near Paris trying to kill each other in order to gain Angelica for themselves.

The narrator joins Venus and Mars less directly in his announcement of the love wars ("guerre amorose") of Orlando and Agricane:

> L'alte venture e le guerre amorose
> Che fer' li antiqui cavallier pregiati,
> E fôrno al mondo degne e gloriose;
> Ma sopra tutti Orlando et Agricane
> Fier' opre, per amore, alte e soprane.
>
> The high adventures and the wars
> For Love famed knights of old performed.
> These works were good and glorious.
> Orlando, though, and Agrican
> Were best, their deeds for Love matchless.
>
> (1.19.1)

First, for those who thought that the poem truly advocated Orlando's love as congruent with both cosmic and human harmony, this announcement of love wars would be an oxymoron. Second, one must wonder exactly what constitutes these high and mighty deeds for Love. If we look once more to the surrounding narrative, we find that the discrepancy between statement and circumstances is so glaring that the context leaves little doubt that the apparent praise hides criticism. In the previous canto, the rival knights were able to lie side by side during the night "Come fosse tra loro antica pace" (Like two men bound by ancient peace, 1.18.40). It is the mention of Angelica that leads them to disregard the rules of chivalric conduct and resume their battle in the middle of the night. It is also telling that Boiardo calls his audience "segnori e cavallieri inamorati" (*Innamorati* knights and lords, 1.19.1) for the first time precisely when they are most inclined to distance themselves from the love-sick knights who are trying to kill each other over Angelica despite the

darkness.[20] Yet if anyone does identify with them, that reader must also go through the process of Agricane's repentence, conversion, baptism, and death, something which might have a rather cathartic effect.

Throughout this episode, in fact, the narrator describes the lover-warriors in light of the *in malo* versions of Mars and Venus. He earlier condemned Agricane for leading his troops to their death in order to satisfy his lust. Agricane:

> Quale era imperator de Tartaria,
> Che avia nel mondo cotanto potere,
> E tanti regni al suo stato obedia.
> Per una dama al suo talento avere,
> Sconfitta e morta fu sua compagnia.
>
> The emperor of Tartary,
> Whose worldly power was so great,
> Whose state so many realms obeyed.
> To win one damsel to his will,
> His soldiers were destroyed and killed.
>
> (1.16.2)

In addition to the stated negative consequences of this passion, the wording "al suo talento" links Agricane to Pasifae as she is depicted in Canto 5 of Dante's *Inferno*.[21] And let us not forget that Agricane and Sacripante are comically likened to "due tori alla verdura / Per una vacca accesi di furore, / Che a fronte a fronte fan battaglia dura" (two bulls at grass, / Driven to frenzy for a cow, / Savagely battle head to head, 1.11.9).[22] While the knights are bulls, Angelica here plays the rather unflattering part of a cow.

This critical view of the poem's *guerre amorose* corresponds to the narrator's opening statement (canto 1) on the negative consequences of inordinate acquisitive desire in general:

> E sì come egli adviene a' gran signori,
> Che pur quel voglion che non ponno avere,
> E quanto son difficultà maggiori
> La desïata cosa ad ottenere,
> Pongono il regno spesso in grandi errori,
> Né posson quel che voglion possedere.
>
> And as it happens to great lords
> Who only want what they can't have,

The greater obstacles there are
To reaching what they would obtain
The more they jeopardize their realms,
And what they want, they cannot gain.

(1.1.5)

While in Agricane's case, the object of desire was Angelica, in the opening canto it is Gradasso's desire for chivalric objects (Ranaldo's horse and Orlando's sword) that occasions the narrator's reflection. In effect, throughout the poem, the narrative shows that excessive acquisitive desire of any type does not lead to the obtainment of the desired object or to any good whatsoever; rather, it brings about destruction and the loss of something previously possessed. In Agricane's case, desire for Angelica leads to the death of many soldiers—directly and indirectly[23]—but also to his own death, and is unequivocably condemned as error in the culminating scene of his conversion and baptism by Orlando.

On other occasions, the narrator feigns diplomatic ignorance or complicity, but what looks like a refusal to criticize serves the opposite purpose by prompting the reader to voice the unspoken criticism. During a later battle between Ranaldo and Orlando at Albraca, the narrator first says that anyone who does not know love would blame the two knights, but in the next stanza tells us that anyone who *does* know love would *not* blame Orlando (1.28.1–2). Yet how could one blame *both* knights when only Orlando is ruled by love and the narrator has already told us that Ranaldo, on the side of duty and justice, had "il diritto e la ragione" (he was clearly in the right, 1.26.14)? (It is interesting to note that Berni replaces the original narrator's feigned refusal to judge with an outright sermon to readers who are, like Orlando, governed by irrational love [1.28.1–5].) To make matters worse, immediately after the suggested complicity between a love-stricken reader and Orlando, the narrator goes on to remind us just what this "love" has done to the paladin:

Ché Orlando, qual di senno era compito,
Di sua natura cangiò sì presto,
E venne impazïente allo appetito.

Because Orlando, born with sense,
Has changed his nature instantly,
Impatient to fulfill his passion:

(1.28.3)

This transformation of Orlando from one ruled by the higher faculties *(senno)* to one subject to the lower ones *(appetito)* is far from an idealized picture of a lover with which the reader would want to identify. One is therefore apt to judge Orlando negatively despite the narrator's apparently "noncritical" stance.[24]

The narrator constantly employs the technique of timing his comments so that the narrative proves an effective negation of them, forcing the reader to interpret them ironically. To give one last example involving the love war at Albraca, the narrator again praises *amore,* this time for its role as an inciter to valor and thereby to victory:

> Però che Amore è quel che dà la gloria,
> E che fa l'omo degno ed onorato,
> Amore è quel che dona la vittoria,
> E dona ardire al cavalliero armato
>
> Love is the source of glory and
> Brings worth and honor to a man,
> For victory is what Love grants;
> Love makes an armed knight valiant.
>
> (2.18.3)

Yet this celebration of love as the road to glory comes just after Orlando has heard about the disastrous effects of infatuation at the fountain of Narcissus, and, instead of trying to destroy the terrible fountain, continues without further delay to Albraca to find Angelica. If we are still expecting a glorious deed on the part of Orlando, we wait in vain. The next scene shows Orlando actually hiding in the woods *(se ascose)* until nightfall, and then sneaking into the castle at Albraca to see Angelica. This is one of the few passages that Berni omitted in his translation, possibly because he considered it to be too shameful. Orlando and Angelica soon sneak out of Albraca together, an act which is the very negation of glorious deeds done for love. They are accompanied by Brandimarte and Fiordelisa, and when the enemy discovers their disappearance and begins to follow, Orlando rides on ahead between the two ladies and leaves Brandimarte all alone to defend them. To add to the ridicule befalling Orlando here, he is unwittingly playing the dupe yet another time by aiding Angelica in her planned seduction of his cousin Ranaldo: the only reason she leaves Albraca for Paris is that she has heard Ranaldo was there. Thus, the extended episode of the love war at Albraca is brought to a close with Orlando's secret and most unglorious exit.

Boiardo's playful narrator sometimes uses the structure of his own

comments to undo their apparent message and allow for an ironic reading of them. This occurs not long after Orlando has emerged victorious from the allegorical garden of Orgagna. The narrator, in apparent praise, seems to equate Orlando and Angelica with legendary lovers of the courtly tradition:

> Tristano e Isotta dalla bionda trezza
> Genevra e Lancilotto del re Bando,
> Ma sopra tutti il franco conte Orlando
>
> Tristan and blond Isolde, King Ban's
> Son Lancelot and Guenevere,
> But most of all, bold Count Orlando
>
> (2.8.2)

Yet the stanza comes to an abrupt halt at the name of Orlando. The parallel established in the previous two verses is sharply broken in the last: Tristan and Isolde, Guenevere and Lancelot, Orlando . . . [and whom?].[25] The second part of the analogy is missing because there is, in fact, no name that can be joined to Orlando's by a conjunction as in the case of the preceding couples. Instead of drawing an analogy between Orlando and these famous couples, the narrator only reveals the gap between them.[26]

Moreover, these verses are part of a greater irony. In the stanza immediately preceding this passage, the narrator praises the combination of love and war: "il pregio e 'l grand'onore / Che donan l'arme gionte con amore" (the praise—great honor—of / Men who conjoin warfare with love, 2.8.1). Yet the reader should not forget that Orlando, on his way back from Orgagna, has just repented of his love for Angelica, condemning his past desire for her as *amor vano* (vain love, 2.7.52). Thus it is at a moment when even Orlando recognizes the error in his irrational love for Angelica that the narrator chooses to taunt us first with an apparent praise of love battles and then with a pseudo-comparison of Orlando with legendary lovers.

Boiardo continues to play the narrator's comments off against the narrative to the very end. The narrator begins the poem's final (unfinished) canto by inviting Love to descend and inspire him as he draws his "citera più eletta / E le più argute corde che abbia in scrigno" (finest harp from store / [to] pluck its most melodic chords, 3.9.1.) Yet all of this lyrical build-up fizzles when we find that the story for which he evoked a divinized Love is nothing more than the humorous account of Fiordespina's attempt to seduce Bradamante, whom she mistakes for a man. Thus, Love is enticed to join the court

where he will find "un altro paradiso" (a paradise, 3.9.3) while the reader is inadvertently headed into yet another destructive labyrinth of desire. Things are definitely not what they seem.

In sum, the above analysis shows that many of the narrator's comments used by past critics to show Boiardo's unconditionally positive view of love reveal instead a framework that supports the moral attitude of the narrative segments. This is accomplished principally through irony, but also through citation, as in the paraphrase of Boethius, and thus creates a much more complex relationship between the narrator and the intended reader. One could wonder whether Boiardo's original audience took an enlightened distance from the narrator's claims. At least those with a Humanist education would have been trained to read between the lines since they already possessed commentaries that aimed to reveal condemnations of love under the appearance of praise. Even Ovid, celebrator of sensual love, was cited as an authority on moral and other sober subjects by a range of scholars the likes of John of Salisbury, Alanus de Insulis, Hugo of St. Victor, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Coluccio Salutati.[27] As Dennis Green says: "The ironist leaves work for the audience to do; they must make his truth their own by reacting against what he appears to mean, so that his purpose in saying something other than what he means is not to deceive with a lie, but to awaken to a truth."[28]

We have so far dealt with a playfully ironic narrator who undermines the apparent meaning of his own remarks on love. At the outset I had also noted his more general claim, that of the wholly pleasurable aspect of the text. These two claims are, in fact, related. If Boiardo is providing an ironic view of a kind of love that he deems negative, then he is already, contrary to his many disclaimers, engaging in a form of didacticism. If Boiardo's narrator had announced a didactic intent for his work, one might have suspected either little regard on his part for the critical acumen of his audience—as is perhaps the case with Berni's solicitations of the "correct" reader response—or perhaps instead the desire to mask a strictly pleasure-giving text with an avowal of moral intent. In other words, he would only have needed to spell out his intent if he did not think the reader would find it otherwise. Yet this would have spoiled the fun for both reader and poet. In fact, Boiardo does spell out his didactic project, but it is through the narrative itself. The body of this study aims to show that Boiardo presents literature as a learning experience where insights derived from underlying meanings can and should be applied to one's life.