2
Angelica

Angelica is the catalyst of the poem's action. Before her arrival in canto 1, the emphasis is on the male show of prowess through a projected joust that includes knights of many nations, both Christian and Saracen. Although there is an apparent accord among peoples, tension both between the two religious groups and within the Christian faction is just below the surface.[1] To complicate matters, king Gradasso is on his way from the East in order to win Orlando's sword and Ranaldo's horse, symbols of the excellence of the two Christian knights. Readers have just adjusted to this Carolingian ambience when a sudden interruption changes the course of the entire poem.

As Charlemagne and the knights are about to begin their banquet, the narrator announces the imminent arrival of a new element into the plot: "Ma nova cosa che ebbe ad apparire / Fe' lui [Charlemagne] con gli altri insieme sbigottire" (But there appeared a prodigy / That made him—with the rest—amazed, 1.1.20). This prodigy, or "prophetic sign," is Angelica, a Saracen princess who has been sent to Paris by her father in order to capture the Christian knights and bring them back to him as prisoners. Like Gradasso's quest for symbolic objects of knighthood, Angelica's mission poses a threat to the Christian kingdom from the East and thus reflects an underlying Carolingian fear of a Muslim invasion. At the same time, however, she hides that threat by her recourse to a typical romance motif: she proposes a joust in which the ablest knight will win possession of her. Through her challenge, she transforms the world of the Carolingian epic into a locus for the action typical of Arthurian romance. Yet she does more than this—she transports these Carolingian knights into a magical realm that combines both the Arthurian prose

romance and the Provençal courtly love lyric. In order to see what is at stake here, we need to situate Angelica with respect to the two principle intertexts of this opening scene.

The text usually cited as a source for Angelica's entrance is the French medieval romance *Guiron le courtois*, rendered in Italian as *Girone il Cortese* by Rusticano da Pisa.[2] In the opening scene, Arthur's knights are promised the possession of a lady if they can unhorse a certain knight in a joust. Yet further parallels are lacking. The *Guiron*'s lady waits outside the palace—and thus outside the text—while a joust with an unknown knight is proposed by a messenger. Indifferent to the woman, Arthur's knights fight first to show their valor and to curb the pride of the unknown knight, and later to avenge their companions' shame upon losing to the challenger. In the *Innamorato*, on the other hand, Angelica enters the great hall to proclaim herself as the prized object of the joust, and the challenge is not as central to the text at this point as is her appearance itself, as well as the effect of her presence upon the knights.

The aura surrounding Angelica in this entrance scene is partially derived from her relation to a very different Arthurian intertext: the appearance of the Holy Grail at Arthur's court. In the opening scene of the *Queste del Saint Graal*,[3] as in the *Innamorato*, a king and a group of knights, seated at a "round table," are about to partake in a meal to celebrate the feast of Pentecost.[4] Although feast days were common openings of chivalric romances, here the central importance of the particular feast of Pentecost is revealed by the events about to take place. In both texts the harmonious initial scene is broken up by a sudden apparition. The Grail is preceded by a ray of sunlight, and it illuminates the room as if the Holy Spirit had entered (15).[5] In the *Innamorato*'s opening canto, the narrator likens Angelica to the morning star, and elsewhere in the poem also describes her with metaphors of light (1.3.69, 1.6.42, 2.20.14). Moreover, the fair-skinned blonde maiden who enters the room surrounded by four giants is pictorially reminiscent of a fourteenth century Italian version of the *Queste* in which the Grail enters the hall on a white doe surrounded by four men.[6]

The reactions of the knights in both texts are similar: rather than speaking in tongues like the early apostles upon the revelation of the Holy Spirit, they are rendered utterly speechless by the vision they are beholding. Of the knights of the *Queste:* "il n'avoit laienz home qui poist parler ne dire mot de sa bouche: si furent tuit amui grant et petit" (there was not a man who could speak or emit a word from his mouth: the mighty and the small were all mute [15]). In the *In-*

namorato, Christian as well as Saracen knights are "de stupor conquiso" (thunderstruck, 1.1.23) and "Stava ciascuno immoto e sbigottito" (Each stood immobile, stupefied, 1.1.33). Neither the Grail nor Angelica are known fully at the moment of their appearance, and they disappear soon afterward. Yet the desire they awaken in the knights signals the breakup of the Pentecostal feast as several knights set out on a quest in search of a greater revelation. Among Arthur's knights leaving Camelot in search of a fuller vision of the Grail, Gauvin swears: "je ne revendrai a cort por choses qui aviegne devant que je l'aie veu plus apertement qu'il ne m'a ci este demostrez" (I shall not return to court for anything that happens until I have seen more openly what has been shown to me, 16). The bulk of the novel consists in the adventures encountered by the various knights during that search. At the court of Boiardo's Charlemagne, Angelica's appearance causes an exodus of the most formidable knights. Among those who set out in search of the mysterious damsel is Orlando, whose soliloquy about his projected search for Angelica recalls Gauvain's determination to find the Holy Grail cited above:

> Sol di Parigio mi voglio partire,
> Ed andaro cercando il viso adorno,
> Sin che lo trovo, e per state e per verno,
> E in terra e in mare, e in cielo e nello inferno.
>
> I will leave Paris by myself
> And search to find Angelica
> Through summer and through winter, till
> I've covered land, sea, heaven, hell!
>
> (1.2.26)

In both texts the action is soon displaced from the court to the unknown and magical territory beyond.

I stated earlier that Angelica brings not only Arthurian romance but also courtly love lyric into the poem. In the long tradition of the love lyric beginning with the Provençal troubadours, there are many ladies who are said to have captured the beauty of angels, and the depiction of the *donna angelicata* is commonplace. Yet Boiardo relies on a specific scene in one particular text for the lyrical elements of this opening scene: Beatrice as she first appears to Dante at the opening of the *Vita Nuova*. Boiardo suggests Angelica's nearness to Beatrice even in the announcement of her arrival: "Ma nova cosa

che ebbe ad apparire" (But there appeared a prodigy, 1.1.20). In medieval terminology, *nuovo* could mean miraculous, and Dante in fact often used it to refer to the divine nature of Beatrice as he does, for example, in the doctrinal canzone of the *Vita Nuova*'s new phase ("Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore"): "Dio ne 'ntenda di far cosa nova" (God does have something new in mind for earth).[7] Second, the verb *apparire* of Boiardo's announcement is prominent in the earlier text. Dante repeats it three times in the three sentences which describe Beatrice's first appearance to Dante in the *Vita nuova* ("a li miei occhi apparve prima la glorisa donna de la mia mente" [there appeared before my eyes the now glorious lady of my mind], "quasi dal principio del suo anno nono apparve a me" [she appeared to me at about the beginning of her ninth year], and "apparve vestita di nobilissimo colore" [she appeared dressed in the most patrician of colors]), and he uses it on later occasions to signal the emergence of the divine (whether Beatrice or Amore) in an earthly setting.[8] A further link to Beatrice is the effect Angelica has on the onlookers. Like the Holy Grail, in fact, both women cause trembling and silence. In "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare," as Beatrice greets her onlookers, "ogne lingua deven tremando muta," and in the presence of the *Innamorato*'s Angelica: "Stava ciascuno immoto e sbigottito" (Each stood immobile, stupefied, 1.1.33). Among others, Duke Naimo "tremava sbigotito e stanco" (trembled, he felt stunned and faint, 1.1.32).

The link between Angelica and her "divine" predecessors develops from an engaging parallel into a stark and deliberate contrast once we move from her initial appearance to her larger role in the poem. Considering first her relation to the Grail, we could note that the Grail's appearance in Arthur's court is understood as a sign of God's love or agape,[9] while Angelica's arrival at the court of Charlemagne is instead the result of her Saracen father's hate of the Christians. Second, although both apparitions induce the knights to set out from court, Arthur's knights set out on a spiritual and mystical quest which will bring the successful ones to salvation, while Charlemagne's paladins are propelled forward by profane desire on a course which can take them only downward to perdition. Finally, an essential characteristic of the journey of Arthur's knights links them to the early apostles who had witnessed the Holy Spirit and who soon afterward left Jerusalem to preach the gospel: their agape imperative. Only those knights devoted to pursuing other-regarding actions (as well as to maintaining their chastity, i.e., renouncing *eros*) will finally obtain the Grail's beatific vision. Needless to say, those seek-

ing to obtain Angelica for themselves do the very opposite: they transform their neighbors into enemies and rivals.

With regard to Beatrice, the initial parallels also help to set up a shocking opposition. The name Beatrice indicates "she who makes blessed," and indeed, as Dante tells us, no one who has spoken to her can end up among the damned. By her name, Angelica would seem to indicate a continuation of this medieval assertion that *nomina sunt consequentia rerum*. Yet according to Marfisa, and here we must agree with the Walkyrian warrior-maiden, Angelica's name is the very opposite of her nature. Again, if we consider the role of both Angelica and Beatrice in the larger scheme of things, their missions follow a somewhat parallel path but with intended opposite results. Beatrice is sent by her heavenly father to Dante; Angelica is sent by her earthly father to Charlemagne's knights. Beatrice becomes the guiding force for the pilgrim along a way of salvation which leads back to God in heaven; Angelica also plans to lead the knights back to the realm of her father, yet this journey to Pagania would bring about not only the knights' damnation but, quite possibly, the collapse of Christendom.

Thus, in the opening canto Boiardo establishes Angelica's affinity to the Grail and to Beatrice, only to reveal her to be their inverted—or perhaps perverted—mirror image. Yet one may ask why Boiardo would evoke both the Holy Grail and Beatrice in this ambiguous and contradictory way in his portrayal of Angelica. The answer may very well lie in the complementary role of the two texts: the *Queste* and the *Vita Nuova* present nothing less than the spiritualization of the chivalric romance and the spiritualization of the courtly love lyric, respectively. The *Queste* attempts to redefine chivalry by representing the victory of the heavenly brand of chivalry of the Grail knight inspired by Christian doctrine over the earthly kind inspired by love intrigues. Those who finally obtain the beatific vision of the Grail are those whose lives embody the very concept of agape which is in the text opposed to eros.[10] The later *Vita Nuova* still depends on a tradition that glorifies courtly love, and it opposes that tradition by engineering the victory of Dante's new spiritualized love for Beatrice. Thus it seems that in the *Innamorato*'s interrelated realms of *armi* and *amore*, Boiardo purposely evokes the most spiritualized heights of each tradition only to turn the source on its head and send it reeling.

Thus Angelica, although she first appears to the knights with all the outer trappings of the divine, is nevertheless suggested to be, in this opening scene, nothing short of demonic. And it is precisely this

incongruity between the divinity that the knights envision and the lady's demonic intentions that is crucial to Boiardo's poetic enterprise. A master of equivocation, Angelica fights Christendom best by portraying herself in the guise of its sacred images. More generally, it is through his opening depiction of Angelica, the poem's object of desire *per eccellenza*, that Boiardo shows us how the beloved can take on connotations of the divine, leading the knight-lover on the path to idolatry.

The enamored knights see only one side of Angelica, but the readers, familiar with the literary traditions that gave rise to the poem, are better prepared to put her into perspective. Although an original creation of Boiardo, the figure of Angelica has roots in classical, Carolingian, and Arthurian sources. It is in the Carolingian epic that one discovers the female figure whose role and even raison d'être Angelica has most clearly inherited: the Saracen seductress. The epics' Saracen women, frequently described with supernatural powers equating them with witches, categorically attempt to seduce the Christian knight and detract him from his religious mission. In this context, the knight must be strong enough to overcome this sensual temptation and continue his duty as defender of Christendom. Yet the figure of the female who tries to dissuade the hero from his duty does not originate with the Carolingian epics, but is a stereotypical figure in classical literature. We will be noting Angelica's particular affinity to Circe and Dido in chapter 4. In addition, the Arthurian romances also had their share of demonic female figures offering sensual pleasure as an alternative (and therefore obstacle) to knightly duties. Several of these Arthurian-type witches are also found elsewhere in the *Innamorato* (Falerina, Alcina, Dragontina, and Morgana), and they all bear a fundamental resemblance to Angelica.[11]

Angelica draws from all of the literary figures mentioned above and others,[12] yet she can be neither equated with nor limited to any of them. We have just seen that Boiardo makes Angelica an illustration of the angel-demon dichotomy in canto 1, where the reader is introduced to her through the eyes of the idealizing/idolizing knights. But considered from the perspective of the courtly love lyric, elsewhere in the poem she plays both the part of the haughty, unloving beloved who scoffs at her admirers (Orlando, Feraguto, Sacripante, et al.) and the part of the unloved lover who suffers as she pursues unsuccessfully the object of her desire (Ranaldo). Viewing her from the perspective of the chivalric tradition, she plays alternately the damsel in distress and the liberator of knights in distress, notably of Christen-