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CHARLES S. ROSS

**BOUNDLESS BOIARDO.
THE SOURCES OF “MERA VIGLIA” FROM THE
RENAISSANCE TO THE CLASSICS**

1. *From Boiardo to Tasso: the poets and the critics*

It is perhaps not surprising that the poet who preferred his father Bernardo's *Amadigi di Gaula* to Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* would, in his theoretical writings, produce a concept of the marvelous which is impossible to reconcile with Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*.¹ For where Torquato Tasso is a poet of strict limitations, precise language, and controlled wonders, Boiardo is the poet of the boundless: armies overwhelm the continents, adventures never end, an armory of enchantments is ever ready for everything.

Later epics felt the anxiety of Boiardo's influence. When John Milton

¹ For the defense by Torquato of the unity of Bernardo's *Amadigi*, see T. Tasso, *Apologia della Gerusalemme Liberata*, in Id., *Scritti sull'arte poetica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1977, vol. I, p. 70.

faced the problem of depicting infinitude and eternity, particularly in the first half of *Paradise Lost* where Satan in all his immensity must find his way from hell through utter Chaos to our world, he modified the few scriptural indications of physicality, from which he could not veer, by adding a healthy dose of Italian exuberance. Samuel Johnson, who recognized the Italian element of Milton's art, found Ariosto's "Paradise of Fools" a strange addition to Milton's Christian cosmos.² But even Johnson missed the element of Italian exuberance. Although many have noticed the source in Ariosto for Milton's famous claim that he would pursue "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme",³ based on the difficulty he faced of describing the spiritual ideas of sin and salvation in physical terms suitable for poetry, few recall that Ariosto took this phrase from Boiardo. When Ariosto says he will tell of "cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima",⁴ he is referring to Orlando's misadventures in love. He makes his claim early in his poem, as Milton does, although not in the cosmic sense we find in Milton's epic, which faces a descriptive task comparable to Dante's. But the line itself, which Milton borrowed from Ariosto, Ariosto himself stole from Boiardo.

In his *Orlando innamorato*, Boiardo uses these words twice to refer to size and scope of the war levied by the North African King Agramante when his armies invade Spain: "La più stupenda guerra e la maggiore / che racontasse mai prosa né verso", "La più fiera bataglia e sterminata, / e la

² See S. Johnson, *John Milton*, in Id., *Lives of the English Poets*, Introduction by L. Archer-Hind, London – New York, Dent – Dutton, 1964, vol. I, p. 105, p. 110, pp. 112-113.

³ See J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in Id., *Poetical Works*, Edited by D. Bush, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 212 (I, 16).

⁴ See L. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, a cura di C. Segre, Milano, Mondadori, 1976, p. 1 (I, 2, 2).

più horrenda e più pericolosa / che raccontasse mai verso né prosa".⁵ The phrase does not occur early in the poem, nor does it refer to the problem of finding physical equivalents for spiritual terms. Instead, it comes as a climax to a series of ever-escalating hyperbole's that produce much of the wonder of Boiardo's art, or as the Italian theorists, following Aristotle, put it, the marvelous.

Before Torquato Tasso drew attention to Boiardo's use of the marvelous, Renaissance criticism usually mentioned Matteo Maria Boiardo only in connection with Ludovico Ariosto, and usually to voice some objections. In his *Discorso contro l'Ariosto* (1575-1576) Filippo Sassetti objected, for example, that the plot of *Orlando furioso* has no proper beginning, since it depends on the fable Boiardo left unfinished. In his *Arte poetica* (1563) Antonio Minturno condemned Ariosto's use of the multiple plot, attacking the decision to borrow the hero Ruggiero from Boiardo, yet he wondered whether Ariosto's romance is that thing of which Aristotle and Horace taught in their respective studies of poetry; that is, whether it is poetry at all.⁶ The decisive answer, although pooh-poohed by strict Aristotelians like Sassetti and Minturno, had already been given by Giovanni Battista Giraldi and Giovanni Pigna. In his *Discorsi intorno al comporre dei romanzi* (1554) Giraldi proclaimed that both Boiardo and Ariosto wrote romances, a poetic form not discussed by Aristotle, whose *Poetics* dealt with tragedies, comedies, and epics. Publishing *I romanzi* (1554), Pigna more specifically defended Ariosto's multiple plot lines because by including Ruggiero, the poet could present a perfect idea of

⁵ See M. M. Boiardo, *L'inamoramento de Orlando*, Edizione critica a cura di A. Tissoni Benvenuti e C. Montagnani, Introduzione e commento di A. Tissoni Benvenuti, Milano – Napoli, Ricciardi, 1999, vol. II, p. 1520 and p. 1546 (II, xxix, 1, 1-2 and xxx, 1, 6-8).

⁶ See B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961, pp. 972-973 and pp. 976-977.

chivalry while praising the Este family and also take advantage of Orlando's more famous name.⁷

Although Giraldi praised Boiardo for his invention, few Renaissance discussions of what was referred to as 'the marvelous' refer to Boiardo. Tasso does, and he is the most important theoretician of this intersection of reality and fantasy. However, Tasso and other Renaissance theorists do not use the word 'marvelous' in a consistent way. Renaissance critics talk about the marvelous either as the effect of certain patterns of diction, or in contrast to the credible, or as the product of unheard, new, and unexpected actions. Boiardo, whose favorite word is *smisurato*, takes the cake in the third category.

By the end of the sixteenth century, most poets pointed to the first of these, diction, to create the marvelous, though diction was the means Boiardo relied upon least. The poet's aim, said Giovan Battista Marino, is the marvelous, the triumph of conceit and wit in writing. As a linguistic phenomenon Marino's conceit and wit connect with Sperone Speroni's earlier discovery of the marvelous in Virgil, or with Giraldi's observation that the marvelous can come from the novelty of an ornate narrative style.⁸ The admirable, marvelous use of words is something that Tasso and Aristotle are always conscious of, aware that almost anything well expressed may provide a pleasure that blurs the effects of other sources of the marvelous.

Tasso never mentions Boiardo when discussing this first form of the marvelous, which occupy the last three *libri* of his *Discorsi del poema eroico* (1594). Indeed, compared to Ariosto's polished diction, Boiardo's *vulgare ferrarese* troubled editorialists such as Francesco Berni and

⁷ See *ibidem*, p. 964 and p. 968.

⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 170 and p. 448.

Ludovico Domenichi in the sixteenth century and Francesco Foffano in the nineteenth, enough that they were at pains to clean up Boiardo's language. Giralaldi, too, disparaged Boiardo's diction in contrast to his much more successful invention:

"E quantunque il Conte, per vizio dell'età, nella quale egli nacque, non spiegasse in carte i suoi concetti con quella felicità di stile e con quella pulitezza di voci, colla quale scrisse Ariosto (il quale ebbe da avere molta grazia a' suoi tempi, nei quali già si era veduta la miglior forma dello scrivere), vi sono però tante altre virtù che può essere in parte ricompensato questo difetto."⁹

It is only in the twentieth century that scholars have come to appreciate Boiardo's rapid, active verse, in studies that highlight the form of his line and stanzas or his successful adaptation of romance *koiné*.¹⁰ Although both Tasso's theory and his practice included a proper appreciation of Boiardo's marvels, he also developed a second concept of that term, one that had been latent among literary theorists. Following Aristotle, everyone agreed that the intervention of the gods in Homer produced delight and was to be admired, at least in the epic form, where the marvelous was more suitable than in tragedy. Although Giralaldi believed that a modern poet could use the pagan gods if his subject was ancient, a conflicting current had appeared in the critical seas, stirred up mainly by discussion about the many marvels in Ariosto. This current insisted on the need for credibility, or verisimilitude. As Ludovico Castelvetro put it, without realizing his critical dilemma, a poem should have "credibility so that the unimaginative audience will believe, the marvelous so that it will

⁹ G. B. Giralaldi, *Discorso intorno al comporre dei romanzi*, in Id., *Scritti critici*, a cura di C. Guerrieri Crocetti, Milano, Marzorati, 1973, p. 50.

¹⁰ See M. Praloran – M. Tizi, *Narrare in ottave*, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1989 and R. Donnarumma, *Storia dell' "Orlando Innamorato". Poetiche e modelli letterari in Boiardo*, Lucca, Pacini-Fazzi, 1996.

find pleasure in the uncommon and the extraordinary”.¹¹ Tasso apparently resolved this dilemma by showing that the marvelous can coincide with the verisimilar, although they far exceed the power of man, if the poet attributes these actions to God, demons, saints, magicians, or *fatas*.¹² Tasso thus distinguished “*meraviglia*,” which arises from wonder at the plot or locution, from the “*meraviglioso*,” which he pairs with verisimilitude.¹³ He makes the distinction by using a medieval distortion of what Aristotle had to say about probability.¹⁴ Aristotle considered probability a criterion of the structure of a poem, but Tasso, following a rhetorical tradition that suggested the probable could be found among the facts which are known, but not known too well, and therefore accepted by a particular audience, made probability a matter of the relationship between a poem’s content and its audience.

In his theoretical writings, Tasso sets this relationship within a discussion of whether the principle argument of a poem should be from true history (it should, he decides) and whether that true history should concern false or true religion. The answer is the latter, Tasso declares, because the

¹¹ See B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, cit., p. 69.

¹² See T. Tasso, *Discorsi sull’arte poetica*, in Id., *Discorsi dell’arte poetica e del poema eroico*, a cura di L. Poma, Bari, Laterza, 1964, pp. 6-7.

¹³ See L. Waters, “*L’altre stelle*”: *The Arguments of Tasso’s “Discorsi del poema eroico”*, in “*Italica*”, 55, 1978, pp. 303-320.

¹⁴ Aristotle is mainly arguing that the job of the poet is to describe not what history says happened, but to present universal truths; that is, what probably or necessarily could happen as a result of previous events or human decisions. What has been done must be possible and therefore is credible, but the poet’s job is to create a plot that connects events by cause and effect, not merely string episodes beyond the bounds of possibility. Thus he writes that things that happen unexpectedly but logically seem more remarkable. Thus when Aristotle writes that for poetic purposes a persuasive impossibility is preferable to something possible but unpersuasive, he says that it is better to assume an impossibility than to assume an unlikely possibility. Our reason lets us accept the assumption of an impossibility, but an audience has trouble believing when someone gets lucky, against long odds, for no reason. Unlike Tasso, Aristotle is not concerned with metaphysical belief but plot. See Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1460a-1461b.

true religion permits the poet to combine the marvelous and the verisimilar. Tasso made this theory the basis for his own choice of the First Crusade as the subject of *Gerusalemme liberata* and his selection of Christian angels to provide his epic machinery.

This theory had tremendous influence on later epics. The *merveilleux* was essential in France and did not violate the rules of *vraisemblance* because the intervention of the supernatural in human affairs was essential Christian dogma, besides being attested by historians. Though Pierre de Ronsard practiced the *merveilleux païen*, the *merveilleux chrétien* was called for by Guillaume de Saluste du Bartas and Jean Vauquelin de la Fresnaye; Antoine Godeau amplified the argument in 1633, and the 1650's, under the influence of Tasso, the victory of the *merveilleux chrétien* was complete.¹⁵

One need not review later epics to prove the woefulness of Tasso's influence: theoretical considerations will do the job. First, nowhere does Tasso say that the combination of the marvelous and verisimilar produces delight. Separately each may delight, but there is no special benefit in the combination, other than certain extratextual considerations, such as Tasso's troubled relationship with the Inquisition. Second, Tasso's theory does not really account for his own marvelous episodes, such as his garden of Armida, scenes tangential to the main plot and its Christian machinery. For these the excuse was allegory, but allegory often begins where verisimilitude ends.¹⁶ Third, it does not take an Aristotelian to realize that it is not subject matter that produces delight, but the treatment of it.

¹⁵ See D. Maskell, *The Historical Epic in France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 20.

¹⁶ For the breakdown of the literal level as a clue to the presence of allegory, see M. Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 142.

2. *Boiardo and the marvelous in classical texts*

Although Tasso's strictures on verisimilitude cannot assure the success of a story, they can guard against failure. Moreover, it appears that Boiardo himself was aware that the power of magic and nature are, as Tasso puts it, restricted by certain laws, that is, that even the marvelous has to have a certain amount of verisimilitude.¹⁷ The term verisimilitude was not well defined in Boiardo's time, but Boiardo's awareness of this principle can be seen in his translation of the *Metamorphoseon libri* of Apuleius (circulating in manuscript in the 1490s), from 1469 edition of Giovanni Andrea dei Bassi.¹⁸ In bringing the story out of late classical Latin into fifteenth-century Italian, Boiardo made certain changes in details that have to do with the demonic. There are several witches in the *Metamorphoseon libri*, and as they are introduced into the story, Apuleius presents a catalog of their powers (I, 8). Like earlier, classical literary witches, such as Ovid's Medea and Horace's Canidia, they can call down the sky, hang earth in heaven, freeze fountains, melt mountains, raise the spirits of the dead, send gods to hell, put out the stars, and give light to Tartarus itself. Ariosto parodies this catalog of powers in his play *Il negromante*; Merlin has similar powers in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, as does Caliban's mother in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In translating the catalogue, however, Boiardo makes several distinct changes. Although he leaves unchanged the ability of witches to veil the stars, he three times omits from his translation their ability to move them.¹⁹

¹⁷ See T. Tasso, *Discorsi sull'arte poetica*, cit., p. 8.

¹⁸ See E. Fumagalli, *Matteo Maria Boiardo volgarizzatore dell' "Asino d'Oro"*. *Contributo allo studio della fortuna di Apuleio nell'Umanesimo*, Padova, Antenore, 1988.

¹⁹ See M. M. Boiardo, *Apulegio Volgare tradotto per el Conte Matteo Maria Boiardo*, Venezia, Niccolo d'Aristotele & Vincenzo de Polo, 1518, c. Aii v (he drops

In doing this, he is following commentators who insisted on the impossibility of even demons tampering with heavenly bodies. In the *Historia destructionis Troie*, for example, Guido dalle Colonne, the medieval reteller of Homer's tale, explains that his story claims that Medea can cause an eclipse, but that the fable must be understood as fabulous because God put the planets into eternal order, and no one can move them.²⁰

In making his changes to the *Metamorphoseon libri*, Boiardo, it seems, brought Apuleius's story into line with fifteenth-century belief that God put the planets into eternal order. Boiardo achieved a similar effect by substituting the ending of a version by Lucian, a second-century A. D. Syrian writing in Greek, for the ending Apuleius composed some years earlier. For Apuleius, writing in Latin a few years earlier, when the protagonist Lucius changes back from an ass to a man, the priests and people attribute the transformation to a miracle of the Egyptian goddess Isis. In Lucian and Boiardo, however, the spectators are ready to burn Lucius for sorcery; they resemble a crowd of Renaissance witch hunters.²¹ These changes by Boiardo protect his translation from failure due to audience disbelief; they do not ensure its success because success depends on the treatment of the story: "imaginative structures as such are independent of belief, and it makes no difference to the structure whether

"stellas evelli"), c. Aiiii r (he leaves in "sidera extinguere"), c. Biiii r (he omits "omnem istam lucem mundi sideralis imis Tartari et in vetustum Chaos sommergere"), c. Cvi v (he neglects "turbantur sidera"); and Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* Edited and Translated by J. A. Hanson, Cambridge (Mass.) – London, Harvard University Press, 1989, vol. I, p. 6 (I, 3), p. 18 (I, 8), p. 68 (II, 5), p. 154 (III, 15).

²⁰ See Guido dalle Colonne, *La storia della guerra di Troia tradotta in lingua volgare...*, Napoli, Egidio Longo, 1665, p. 20.

²¹ See M. Acocella, *L' "Asino d'oro" nel Rinascimento. Dai volgarizzamenti alle raffigurazioni poetiche*, Ravenna, Longo, 2001, pp. 53-71.

the implied beliefs are real, pretended, or denounced as demonic”.²²

Apuleius brings us to the heart of Boiardo’s art and to the third Renaissance theory of the marvelous. The narrator of the *Metamorphoseon libri* informs us at the beginning of the story that he is a person who by his nature desires to hear everything new. Assured by a passing traveler, one who will actually tell the tale of Lucius, that the whole story is as much a lie as to say that rivers by magic charms return to their sources or the oceans congeal or daylight may be taken away and the night made to continue forever, the narrator, who had been nervous about intruding, begins to speak more confidently, and he asks the tale-teller to continue. The speaker says that the tale-teller’s words have made him not more confident, but more avid to hear. The verisimilitude of the marvels told is not an issue, only an objection to be met and dismissed: the narrator says that these things are easy to understand if one knows how they are done. These marvels are not false merely because they are new to the hearer or because they seem difficult or because they pass the capacity of man’s reason.²³

These ideas, the new, the great, the strange, are in fact what constitute the marvelous for Boiardo.²⁴ His preface to his translation of Herodotus’s *Historiae* defines the marvelous in a similar way. The *Historiae*, says Boiardo, are marvelous because they are so “stupende.”²⁵ Herodotus tells about things that are strange and marvelous as well as

²² See N. Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 13.

²³ See Apuleius, *Metamorphoseon libri*, I, 2-4.

²⁴ For an updated approach to the marvelous in Boiardo see N. J. Tussing, *The Marvellous in Boiardo’s “Orlando Innamorato”: A Study in Perceptual and Perspectival Relations*, Washington, The Catholic University of America, 2002.

²⁵ See Erodoto, *Historia delle guerre de Greci et de Persi, tradotto di greco in lingua italiana per il conte Matteo Maria Boiardo...*, Venezia, Giovanni Antonio Nicolini da Sabbio, 1533, s. n. p. (Prologo).

grand and marvelous. The same concept informs the *Inamoramento de Orlando*. In the second line of his poem, Boiardo promises he will tell “cose dilettose e nove”, the deeds of Orlando described in his usual hyperbolic manner: “E vedereti i gesti smisurati, / l’alta fatica e le mirabil prove”.²⁶ Then, in the second stanza, Boiardo sets the tone for his whole poem when he points out that readers will probably think it “meraviglioso” that Orlando, Christendom’s greatest knight and most famous chase warrior, is “inamorato”.²⁷ Presumably, this marvel is objectionable, because Boiardo immediately tries to explain it away. Let it not seem marvelous, he wryly says, to hear Orlando is in love, because it is in fact the proudest men who love defeats and subjugates, men who are proud, presumably, because they perform the measureless, grand, and wonderful deeds that the first stanza conjures. Thus the action is *not* marvelous because it is *not* unexpected; Orlando’s passion follows naturally from his elevated character. Further to reduce the marvelous, Boiardo insists that his main action is true, not invented: Turpin wrote it all down in a manuscript he hid because it was disrespectful to Count Orlando. Of course, Boiardo is being ironic. As in the *Metamorphoseon libri*, verisimilitude is an objection to be met and dismissed.

Even when the problem of verisimilitude is eliminated, however, a paradox remains in the first two stanzas. In the first, we are promised a story that is delightful and new. In the second, we are assured that the story is not marvelous because it is not new. The explanation of the paradox, besides the irony, is that Boiardo’s materials are not new, but his treatment of them is. His characters can usually be found in sources, especially *La*

²⁶ See M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 5 (I, i, 1, 2 e 5-6). See Id., *Orlando Innamorato*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by C. S. Ross, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

²⁷ See M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 6 (I, i, 2, 1-2).

Spagna in its various versions.²⁸ He himself tells us that he combined Carolingian and Arthurian romances.²⁹ Even when he declares that a “nova cosa” is about to appear, like Morgana’s golden-antlered stag,³⁰ what appears is something old, the white stag, or hart, of Arthurian story and countless retellings.³¹

Many of Boiardo’s stories come from classical myth, especially Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Boiardo’s fabulous pagan armies and his Eastern cities as well as other details (Midas’ ring, gold-mining ants), are derived from Herodotus.³² Similarly, many of his marvelous touches come from his close reading of Virgil’s *Aeneid*: just as Virgil’s Cupid imitates the walk of Iulus, Boiardo’s Draghinazzo imitates Gradasso’s;³³ then Draghinazzo’s imitation of Gradasso draws Rinaldo off the battlefield, quite as Virgil’s Juno creates a phantom Aeneas to draw Turnus from the battlefield;³⁴ and the model for Orlando’s descent to Morgana’s realm is Aeneas’ journey to the Underworld.³⁵ Many other marvels come from Pliny’s *Historia naturalis*: Pliny mentions that herbs can restore dragons or men to life, and one thinks of Morgana restoring Ziliante to life, after killing him through a

²⁸ See *La Spagna, poema cavalleresco del sec. XIV*, edito e illustrato da M. Catalano, Bologna, Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1939; *L’Entrée d’Espagne. Chanson de Geste franco-italienne*, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1913; *Il Viaggio di Carlo Magno in Ispagna per conquistare il camino di S. Giacomo*, testo di lingua inedito pubblicato per cura di A. Ceruti, Bologna, Romagnoli, 1871.

²⁹ See M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. II, pp. 1010-1011 (II, viii, 2).

³⁰ See *ivi*, vol. I, p. 632 (I, xxii, 57, 1).

³¹ See Sir Th. Malory, *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Edited by J. Cowen with an Introduction by J. Lawlor, London, Penguin Books, 1986, vol. I, pp. 98-102 (III, 5-7).

³² See Herodotus, *Historiae*, 3, 102 and M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, pp. 29-30 and p. 682 (I, i, 39 and xxv, 6).

³³ See Virgil, *Aeneis*, I, 689-690 and M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 178 (I, v, 40).

³⁴ See Virgil, *Aeneis*, X, 636-646 and M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 180 (I, v, 45).

³⁵ See Virgil, *Aeneis*, VI and M. M. Boiardo, *L’inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. II, pp. 1010-1037 (II, viii).

mistake in her recipe as she transforms him into a dragon.³⁶ Morgana's sister Alcina fishes without a net on the shore of the Caspian Sea, her magic luring exotic fish of boundless size, many whose names appear in Pliny's chapter on supersize sea creatures;³⁷ Egypt's herbs included the celebrated nepenthes, which brought forgetfulness, perhaps the ingredient in Dragontina's cup.³⁸ For Pliny, some of these materials are believable, like the herb nepenthes, some are incredible.³⁹

There is no need to go on listing marvels; the credible and incredible are not workable categories for analyzing Boiardo. The only world that matters for him is the world of literature, not the so-called real world. What is new is what is new to the listener by the way it is told. By positing a real world that links the marvelous to the verisimilar, Tasso sent criticism down a blind alley. His own instincts were better than his theory, however. I think it significant that his only reference to an event in the *Innamorato*, besides his praise of Atalante's and Malagise's transformations, is his approval of the hunt conduct by King Agramante at Biserta: because it produces so much delight, this hunt should not be dismissed, even though it includes terrible and rarely seen beasts.⁴⁰ We can put faith in this marvel if we follow the authority of the ancients, the same ancients whom Tasso later dismissed when he chose recent history and Christian machinery for his own epic.

The marvelous, then, does not lie in the materials from which it is

³⁶ See Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, XXV, 5 and M. M. Boiardo, *L'inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. II, p. 1130 (II, xiii, 5-6).

³⁷ See Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, IX, 4 and M. M. Boiardo, *L'inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. II, p. 1148 (II, xiii, 56).

³⁸ See Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, XXV, 5 and M. M. Boiardo, *L'inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, pp. 214-215 (I, vi, 45-46).

³⁹ See Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, XXV, 5.

⁴⁰ See M. M. Boiardo, *L'inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. II, pp. 1505-1513 (II, xxviii, 19-40).

drawn, but in the manner in which it is handled. In one of his epistles Boiardo describes the running of armed men and horses as “una maraviglia”.⁴¹ It is this marvelous that is the key to Boiardo’s poetry. A man in armor does not raise questions of verisimilitude, but to see Serpentino armed, says Boiardo, was “maraviglioso”.⁴² That Astolfo hurls insults at Agricane’s army is entirely believable, yet Boiardo says these insults made everybody marvel (“da far maravigliar ogni persona”).⁴³ When Marfisa socks Ranaldo, the power of her punch makes even Boiardo marvel (“Io di tal bota assai me maraviglio”).⁴⁴ These actions are marvelous and new because of their intensity. In the *Innamorato* we constantly are told things are bigger, uglier, stronger, more terrible than anything we have ever seen or heard. The superlative is always new, as is the hyperbolic.

In a sense, Boiardo’s marvelous is rhetorical, because he constantly insists that no matter what has gone on before, what is to come is bigger, stranger, and more wonderful. At the end of the second canto, he promises that when he continues, he will show “gran maraviglia e più strana ventura / che odisti mai per voce o per scrittura”.⁴⁵ After enormous battles and sieges, Boiardo promises a war that will be “La più stupenda guera e la maggiore / che raccontasse mai prosa né verso”.⁴⁶ The curious thing is that Boiardo’s stories actually match his rhetoric. As Alexander Pope said of

⁴¹ See Id., *Lettere*, in Id., *Opere volgari. Amorum libri – Pastorale – Lettere*, a cura di P. V. Mengaldo, Bari, Laterza, 1962, pp. 296-297. For something similar in the history of Hollywood, see John Ford’s description of how to please visitors to his movie studio, he had nothing better to do than take them out to watch a bunch of horses and riders gallop through a movie-set town, stop, turn around, and gallop back the other way.

⁴² See M. M. Boiardo, *L’innamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 70 (I, ii, 33, 2)

⁴³ See *ivi*, vol. I, p. 325 (I, x, 25, 4).

⁴⁴ See *ivi*, vol. I, p. 522 (I, xviii, 21, 1).

⁴⁵ See *ivi*, vol. I, p. 86 (I, ii, 68, 7-8).

⁴⁶ See *ivi*, vol. II, p. 1520 (II, xxix, 1, 1-2).

Homer's battles in the *Iliad*, each duel surpasses the previous encounters.⁴⁷ Boiardo's whole first book is a series of individual combats between two knights, each duel worse than the one before, finally culminating in the greatest fight imaginable, that of the number one and number two knights, Orlando and Rinaldo. Even Boiardo's magic gardens become more and more marvelous, luxuriant, enchanting, and convincing as his story proceeds.

T. S. Eliot famously preferred what he called "the objective correlative", as he believed that feelings must be supported by the reality of a situation. Yet earlier story tellers, not unlike Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, prized contrivances that can make impossible things seem so credible that the reader's mind, held in suspense, is ravished with delight and wonder.⁴⁸ It is that wonder which is the true marvelous. There is no delight for the audience in separating the credible from the incredible, but there is pleasure in admiring what is strange and new when Boiardo breaks the bounds of expectations.

⁴⁷ See A. Pope, *Preface*, in *The Iliad of Homer*, translated by A. Pope, London, Grant Richards, 1902, p. XIV.

⁴⁸ See T. S. Eliot, *Hamlet and His Problems* (1919), in Id., *Collected Essays*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1960, pp.121-126 and W. Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1963, p. 126.

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