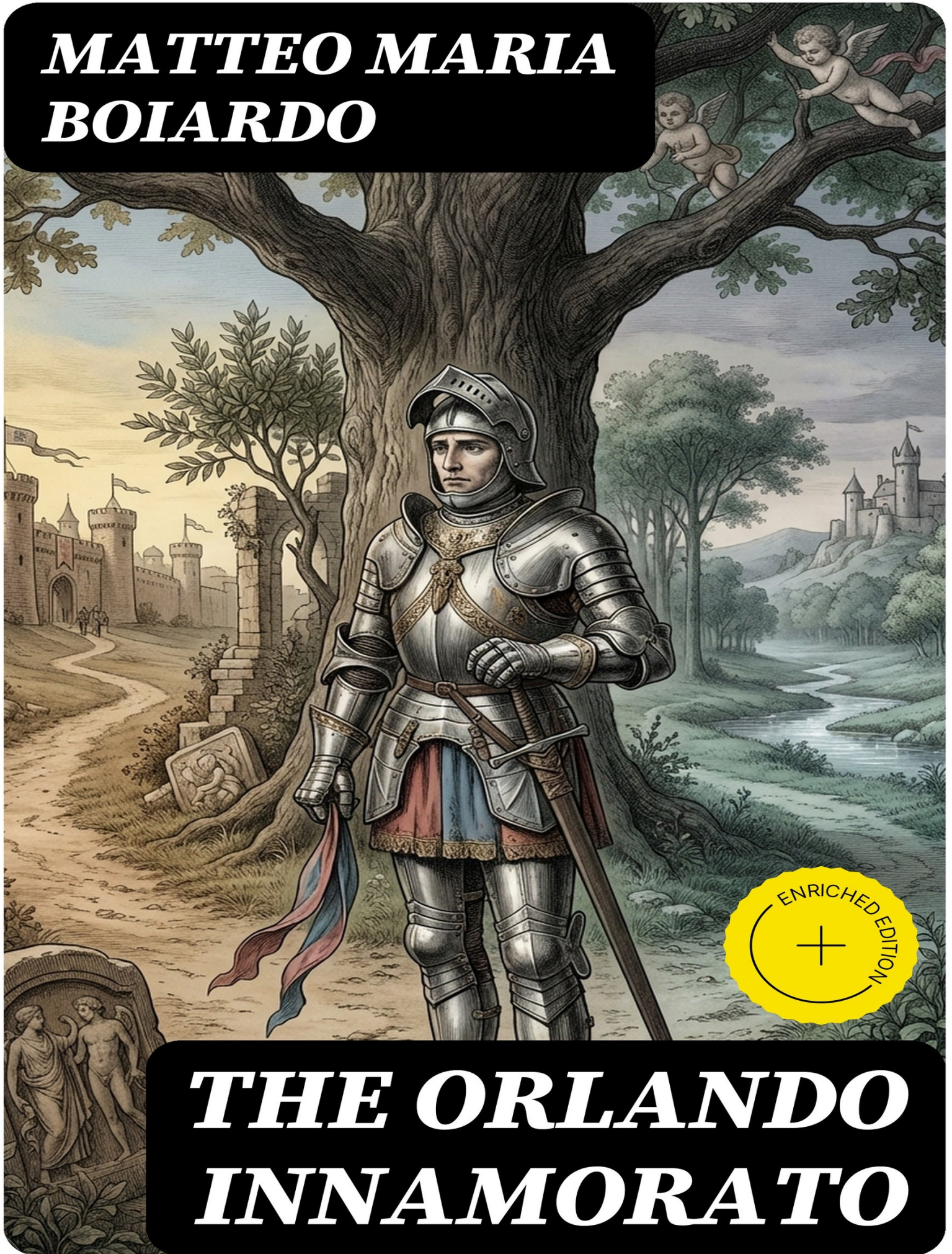


**MATTEO MARIA  
BOIARDO**



**THE ORLANDO  
INNAMORATO**

**MATTEO MARIA  
BOLARDO**



**THE ORLANDO  
INNAMORATO**

**Matteo Maria Boiardo**

# **The Orlando Innamorato**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Cooper Black*

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# Introduction

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At the heart of *The Orlando Innamorato* lies the exhilarating and disquieting truth that love can unhorse the mightiest champion, reroute kingdoms, and send reason wandering through forests as trackless as desire. Matteo Maria Boiardo's romance sets chivalric valor against the sudden storm of passion, tracing how pursuit, rivalry, and enchantment loosen the fixed armor of custom. From its opening movements, the poem insists that feeling is a world-making force, capable of reorganizing loyalties and remapping the known earth. The resulting narrative is both festive and serious, alive to marvels yet attentive to the costs of obsession, a work where wonder and ethical hesitation ride side by side.

Composed in late fifteenth-century Italy during the Renaissance, *The Orlando Innamorato* is a chivalric romance in ottava rima that draws on Carolingian legend and fantastical adventure. Boiardo, an accomplished court poet, shapes a narrative that ranges across medieval Christendom and imagined Easts, from embattled capitals to bewitched groves. The poem remained unfinished at the author's death, and its world would be famously continued and transformed in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* in the following century. Read on its own terms, however, Boiardo's work inaugurates a capacious Italian epic tradition, balancing courtly refinement with the expansive energies of popular storytelling.

The premise is audacious in its simplicity: Orlando, the peerless paladin of Charlemagne, finds his heart conquered by Angelica, a dazzling stranger whose presence unsettles courts and camps alike. Around this desire whirl intersecting quests, duels, rescues, and enchantments, as knights from many lands pursue honor, vengeance, or simply the next marvel. Boiardo's narrative voice is urbane and companionable, capable of gentle irony and sudden tenderness, attentive to etiquette yet amused by human foibles. The style relishes digression and suspense, pausing to savor a scene before slipping to another thread, creating a tapestry of motion that feels vividly serial.

Written in the singing cadence of ottava rima, the poem cultivates momentum through interlaced episodes that often pause at the edge of revelation, inviting the reader to lean forward. Boiardo uses the stanza's turn to shift perspectives, counterpointing solemn valor with comedic grace and introducing wonder with almost conversational ease. Scenes of battle are set beside scenes of courtship, deception, and dream, so that action and reflection alternate like steps in a dance. The result is not a straight march but a measured whirl, a narrative architecture designed to hold multiplicity without losing clarity or human measure.

Its themes arise from this structure of pursuit and postponement. Love contests duty, personal glory complicates communal need, and the craving for renown travels uneasily with the longing for intimacy. The poem maps a world of contested faiths and cultures, yet it repeatedly grants nobility and agency across dividing lines,

portraying opponents as potential companions in honor. Fortune, a restless force, governs battles and meetings, while magic renders visible the wishful distortions of perception. Again and again, Boiardo asks how a knight should act when the straight path dissolves, and whether fidelity can survive when desire redraws the compass.

For contemporary readers, the poem matters both as a living pleasure and as a hinge in literary history. It opens the door to the exuberant Renaissance epics that follow, yet its own riches reward attention: a plural, mobile geography; a sympathy that complicates enemy lines; and a frank acknowledgment that passion can reorder public life. Its serial, interlaced design anticipates modern storytelling that moves across ensembles and cliffhangers, while its playful narrator models an intimate, witty companionship with the audience. The *Orlando Innamorato* endures because it understands heroism not as hardness but as a capacity to be changed.

Approach it expecting movement rather than closure, companionship rather than pronouncement, and a horizon that keeps opening. Because the poem is unfinished, its energy is suspended rather than spent, an effect that suits a story about urges that outrun plans. The pleasures here are cumulative: the roll of the stanza, the sparkle of courtly skirmish, the recognition that rivals can mirror one another's hearts. In an era still wrestling with desire's public consequences and with encounters across languages and creeds, Boiardo's romance offers a spirited, humane invitation to imagine courage as attention, and fidelity as a practice under pressure.

# Synopsis

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Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, composed in the late fifteenth century in ottava rima, inaugurates the Italian romantic epic by fusing Carolingian legend with courtly love. At Charlemagne's Paris, Orlando (Roland) stands foremost among Christian knights when an exotic embassy appears: Angelica, a princess from the East, and her brother Argalia. Their arrival during a great tournament instantly disquiets the chivalric order, as Angelica's beauty awakens desire across enemy lines and within the emperor's paladins. Boiardo frames love as a disruptive force, sending renowned champions from the lists and the battlefield into restless pursuit, and opening a web of interlaced adventures.

Argalia bears an enchanted lance and sets conditions that bind defeated challengers to Angelica's power, tightening the knot between prowess and passion. The fragile equilibrium collapses when the Saracen warrior Ferrau slays Argalia, prompting Angelica to flee. Orlando and his cousin Rinaldo, both overcome, chase her through forests and enchanted spaces, their rivalry repeatedly reversed by marvels such as the Fountains of Love and Hate. Angelica's protective ring, capable of undoing spells, lets her evade captors and illusions. In these early movements, Boiardo contrasts knightly duty with amorous obsession, showing how desire diverts even exemplary heroes from imperial service.

Beyond private pursuit, larger wars gather. Saracen and eastern monarchs assemble forces against Charlemagne, while distant kings pursue talismanic prizes. Gradasso of Sericana covets Orlando's sword Durindana and Rinaldo's horse Bayard, advancing campaigns motivated as much by coveted objects as by faith or honor. Agramante emerges among the pagan leaders, flanked by champions such as Rodomonte and Sacripante, whose valor often mirrors that of their Christian foes. The poem's interlace shifts from siege to skirmish to embassy, with courtesies and single combats punctuating musters and marches. Orlando's wandering for love becomes a strategic liability, blurring lines between public peril and private compulsion.

Angelica's flight carries the action far from Paris to cities like Albraca, where she is alternately protected and imperiled by those who desire her. The formidable king Agrican besieges her stronghold, drawn by both conquest and passion. Orlando, still enamored, is drawn into these eastern theaters, where Boiardo stages measured encounters that balance ferocity with courtesy. A celebrated nocturnal duel by a fountain crystallizes the poem's poise: adversaries speak as much as they strike, and fortune turns on a blend of prowess, passion, and chance. Through such episodes, the narrative tests how love reframes enmity and how fame is won or wasted.

A parallel thread introduces Ruggiero and Bradamante, whose destinies intertwine chivalry, prophecy, and dynastic hope. The enchanter Atlante strives to sequester Ruggiero from a fate glimpsed in visions, raising illusion-filled castles that trap friend and foe. Bradamante, a Christian heroine of

formidable skill, pursues him across mazes of magic and mistaken paths, and their mutual attraction complicates loyalties divided along confessional lines. Boiardo links their future to princely lineage familiar to his courtly audience, sowing seeds of continuity that later poets would harvest. This strand amplifies the poem's central inquiry: whether love can found lasting orders without dissolving knightly duty.

Marvels structure the poem's motion. Rings that cancel enchantments, sorcerers' gardens, and labyrinthine castles repeatedly redirect quests, while courteous speech and ritual combat stabilize conflict just enough to keep it legible. Episodes such as the ruinous garden of the sorceress Falerina foreground the contest between appetite and restraint, testing champions through temptations as often as through arms. Boiardo's ottava rima and frequent authorial asides manage the sprawling cast, pausing for moral reflections, celebrations of patrons, and witty deferrals that sustain suspense. The texture is cosmopolitan, spanning western courts and imagined Easts, where marvel and geography meet in a shared theatre of honor.

The poem remains unfinished, breaking off amid unresolved sieges, rivalries, and entanglements. Its open fabric invited continuation, most famously by Ludovico Ariosto, who carried forward its characters and questions in *Orlando Furioso*. *Orlando Innamorato* endures less for a closed revelation than for the energies it sets in motion: love as centrifugal force, prowess redirected by desire, and chivalry tested by a world of wonder. Its synthesis of

Carolingian matter, courtly psychology, and Renaissance invention shaped the European romance tradition, offering a capacious model for interlaced storytelling whose echoes continue wherever adventure, passion, and irony vie for narrative command.

# Historical Context

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Matteo Maria Boiardo composed the *Orlando Innamorato* between roughly 1476 and 1494 at the Este court of Ferrara in northern Italy. A nobleman from Scandiano and a court official under Duke Ercole I d'Este, he wrote in Italian using ottava rima to fuse Carolingian legend with romance themes. The poem's early parts circulated in print in the 1480s, and the work remained unfinished at the author's death in 1494. Set against a chivalric past yet written for a Renaissance audience, it foregrounds love as a disruptive force within knightly culture, introducing figures later central to Italian epic, while maintaining an urbane, courtly tone.

Ferrara in the late quattrocento was a powerful Signoria governed by the Este family, positioned between the Papal States, Venice, and Milan. Courtly institutions structured cultural life: patronage, humanist libraries, and elaborate spectacles encouraged literary production. The Este cultivated learned officials who combined administrative service with letters, and Boiardo served as governor of Reggio (from 1478) and of Modena (from 1481). The court's Estense library, enriched by classical and vernacular manuscripts, fostered a milieu where classical ideals mingled with medieval narratives. Boiardo's dedication to Ercole I reflects a system in which writers addressed princely audiences and adapted inherited stories to courtly tastes.

Regional warfare shaped the decade in which Boiardo wrote. The War of Ferrara (1482–1484), also called the Salt War, pitted Ferrara against Venice and Pope Sixtus IV over trade and territorial control. Ferrara endured sieges and negotiated a settlement at the Treaty of Bagnolo (1484), which imposed losses yet preserved Este rule. Boiardo administered contested territories during these years, witnessing the pressures of diplomacy, finance, and mobilization. That political experience informed his attention to alliance, honor, and service in a world where loyalties could shift. The work's chivalric framework thus intersects with the practical realities of princely governance and conflict.

In 1494 Charles VIII of France invaded the Italian peninsula, opening the Italian Wars, which transformed the peninsula's balance of power and military techniques. Contemporary observers noted unprecedented artillery and rapid campaigning. Boiardo's poem famously breaks off amid these events, with the author lamenting the violence overtaking Italy and turning from romance to present calamities. He died shortly thereafter, and the narrative remained incomplete until later poets continued it. The invasion's suddenness and scale clarified the distance between idealized chivalry and contemporary warfare, a tension that underlies the work's oscillation between playful adventure and sober reflection on fortune and instability.

The poem arose within Renaissance humanism but looked beyond classical epic alone. Italian humanists recovered Latin and Greek texts, yet vernacular writers reshaped medieval materials for new audiences. Boiardo

drew on the Matter of France and Italian cantari traditions, while adopting ottava rima previously energized by Luigi Pulci's *Morgante* in Florence. He integrated classical references and rhetorical polish without abandoning romance's open-ended structure. The result exemplifies late-fifteenth-century experimentation: a courtly, learned reworking of chanson de geste material in a polished Italian idiom, attentive to love, wit, and ethical dilemmas rather than strictly heroic conquest, and designed for reading aloud and print circulation.

Printing amplified the poem's reach. Italian presses had been active since the 1460s, and portions of *Orlando Innamorato* appeared in the 1480s, with further Venetian editions after Boiardo's death. The unfinished state invited continuation: Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (first edition 1516; definitive 1532) presupposed Boiardo's characters and threads, helping to canonize the cycle. In the 16th century Francesco Berni produced a celebrated *rifacimento* (1541, posthumous) that regularized the language, enhancing readability for later audiences. Such editorial and authorial afterlives show how the work participated in a broader print economy where texts were revised, expanded, and adapted to shifting tastes.

The narrative engages medieval Franco-Italian traditions that opposed Christians and Saracens while also portraying non-Christian knights with complexity. Figures of Muslim lineage display valor and courtesy, reflecting a literary convention that allowed admiration for martial and ethical excellence across confessional lines. The term Cathay for distant Asia, applied to a princess whose beauty disturbs

established loyalties, echoes inherited geographical imaginations more than current cartography. Meanwhile, contemporary events—such as the Ottoman capture of Otranto in 1480 and Mediterranean contestation—kept religious conflict vivid for Italian audiences. Boiardo's treatment balances inherited polarities with nuanced characterization, inviting reflection on identity, honor, and conversion.

Ferrara's culture of tournaments, court festivals, and theatrical allegory under Ercole I provided a living model for the poem's jousts, pageants, and amorous trials. Public spectacles cemented Este prestige while staging ideals of prowess and civility that the poem explores and tests. By highlighting love's power to unsettle duty, and by contrasting romance's generous courtesies with the hard calculus of contemporary wars, *Orlando Innamorato* mirrors and critiques its milieu. It celebrates noble virtues and learned elegance yet registers the fractures of late quattrocento Italy, where princely magnificence, humanist erudition, and emergent gunpowder politics coexisted—and often collided—in daily experience.

# THE ORLANDO INNAMORATO

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# INTRODUCTION.

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It is many years since I first entertained a vague idea of translating the *Orlando Furioso*, and circumstances of little importance to the reader, led me more recently to undertake it in earnest. This work was again laid down; and afterwards resumed at the instance of a distinguished friend; and by an odd coincidence, I am indebted also to the suggestion of another eminent person for the idea of the present translation of the *Orlando Innamorato*[\[1\]](#), which, I should observe, is intended to be auxiliary to that, my first and greater undertaking, though I need scarcely say, that the story of Boiardo is a necessary prologue to the poem of Ariosto[\[3\]](#)[\[1q\]](#).

It was my intention to have translated the first mentioned work, exactly upon the model adopted by Tressan in his version of the French romances, a scheme afterwards executed with so much better success, by my late excellent friend, Mr. George Ellis, in his English work of the same description. A further consideration of the subject, however, induced me to imitate them only in their general plan of illustrating a compendious prose translation by

extracts, without seeking to add poignancy to this, by what might give a false idea of the tone of my original. I recollected that I stood in a very different predicament from that of either of these authors; that, to compare my work with the one, which is most likely to be familiar to my readers, the 'Specimens of early English Romances,' the originals are composed in a spirit of gravity which can hardly be confused with the gay style of the translator, and therefore nobody can be misled by the vein of pleasantry which runs through Mr. Ellis's work, and which is sure to be exclusively ascribed to the author of the *Rifacimento*. This, however, would possibly not be the case with me, as the *Innamorato* is in a great measure a humourous work, of which I might give a false impression, by infusing into it a different species of wit, from that which distinguishes it;—a consideration which induced me to adopt the scheme I have pursued in the following sheets.

This project is to give a mere ground-plan of the Gothic edifice of Boiardo, upon a small scale, accompanied with some elevations and sections of the chambers; which I have sought to colour after my original: or, (to speak more plainly,) the reader is to look for the mere story in my prose abridgement, while he may form some notion of its tone and style, from the stanzas with which it is interspersed.

The *story* indeed, which seems most likely to interest the English reader, is that which took a strong possession of the imagination of Milton, who refers with more apparent enthusiasm to the *Innamorato*, than to the *Furioso*, and whose apparent preference is justifiable, if a richer stream

of invention, and more consummate art in its distribution, are legitimate titles to admiration.

In this latter qualification more especially, Boiardo, however inferior as a poet, must be considered as a superior artist to Ariosto; and weaving as complicated a web as his successor, it is curious to observe how much he excels him as a story-teller. The tales, indeed, of Ariosto, (and the want of connexion among these is, in my eyes, his most essential defect) are so many loose episodes, which may be compared to parallel streams, flowing towards one reservoir, but through separate and independent channels. Those of Boiardo, on the contrary, are like waters, that, however they may diverge, preserve their relation to the parent river, to which their accession always seems necessary, and with which they reunite, previous to its discharging its contents into their common resting-place. A short example may serve to illustrate what I have laid down. A damsel in the *Innamorato* relates to Rinaldo the adventures of two worthies named Iroldo and Prasildo, a narration which is interrupted, and which, though good in itself, at first appears to be an insulated episode. Rinaldo, however, afterwards falls in with Iroldo and his friend; and this history, thus resumed, unites itself naturally with that of the paladin. It is thus that all the stories are dove-tailed one into the other, and form a mosaic, as striking from the nice union of its parts, as from the brilliancy of its colours.

Boiardo's art, though here indeed he cannot be said to excel Ariosto, is as conspicuous also in the direction of the strange under-current of allegory which pervades his poem, as it is in the distribution of his stream of story; while the

sort of esoteric doctrines conveyed by it, gives a mysterious interest even to what we imperfectly comprehend.

Such indeed is the case with many of the fables of the *Odyssey*, and even of the *Iliad*; where the allegory, moreover, is always subservient to poetry, and poetry is never made subservient to allegory[39]. This remarkable piece of judgment in the Greek poet has, I think, been well imitated both by Boiardo and Ariosto, and it is the neglect of this principle which has made allegory so often offensive in the *Faery Queene* of Spenser. The obtrusive nature of this has been well compared by Mr. George Ellis, in his *Specimens of the early English poets*, to a ghost in day-light. It is, moreover, destructive to all character; for Spenser's heroes being mere abstract personifications of some virtue or vice, we almost always know what they are to do, though their actions are often unnatural, if considered as the actions of human beings. Hence it is that we are never entertained with pictures of manners in the *Faery Queen*, while these form one of the great charms of the poems with which I am contrasting it.

It may however be said with justice, that we are to ascribe this more picturesque effect of allegory, rather to the spirit of the age than to that of the fabulist. For it is perhaps true that all early fable is purely allegorical; that this is by degrees mixed up with other circumstances, and it is in this mixed character that it is most conducive to poetical effect. But in a later age and later process of refinement, when there is a greater tendency to abstract, allegory is stript of her adventitious ornaments, and is at last forced upon us in poetry, painting, and sculpture,

unveiled, or unencompassed by that sort of pleasing halo which is necessary to give her effect.

But whether we are to ascribe Boiardo's success in this particular to the character of his age, or to his own superior judgment, there is, I think, no doubt about the fact, and there is, I think, as little difficulty in conceding to my author, upon other grounds, the praise of skill in executing the singular work of which he was the architect.

This extraordinary man was Matteo Maria Boiardo, count of Scandiano[2], and a native of Reggio in the Modenese, who flourished in the beginning of the sixteenth century. These are circumstances the more worthy of mention, as some of them tend to explain what may seem most strange in the composition of the *Innamorato*; such as the provincial character of the diction, and more especially that careless and almost contemptuous tone between jest and earnest, which distinguishes his poem[2q]. It is doubtless on this account that Ugo Foscolo observes, in an ingenious critique on the Italian romantic poets, in the *Quarterly Review*\*, that he tells his story in the tone of a feudal baron; thus applying to him more justly what M. de Balzac has objected to another; of whom he says, "qu'il s'est comporté dans son poëme comme un prince dans ses états. C'est en vertu de cette souveraineté qu'il ne reconnoit point les lois, et qu'il se met au dessus du droit commun."

\* In an article purporting to be a review of *Whistlecraft's poem*, (now entitled *The Monks and Giants*,) and *The Court and Parliament of Beasts*.

After speaking of the mode in which he arranged his work, it is a natural transition to the substance with which