



## Giusto Lodico (1826-1906)

[Jo Ann Cavallo \(Columbia University\)](#)

Prose writer.

Active - in Italy

Very little is known about the life of Giusto Lodico. Born in Palermo, he studied to become an elementary school teacher and subsequently tutored privately and taught in both Palermo and Alia (Li Gotti, *Il teatro dei pupi*, 109). Yet this otherwise obscure figure has been a household name in Sicilian popular culture since the late 1850s, heralded as the ultimate authority in matters concerning Charlemagne and his knights. His towering reputation stems from his authorship of *La storia dei paladini di Francia cominciando da Milone conte d'Anglante fino alla morte di Rinaldo* [The History of the Paladins of France from Count Milone of Anglante to the Death of Rinaldo], which became the foundational text for Sicilian puppet theater in the following decades.

Lodico's almost three-thousand-page prose compilation weaves together various Italian medieval and Renaissance classics, as well as other works less familiar today, that drew their initial thread from the French Carolingian cycle, in particular *La chanson de Roland* [The Song of Roland]. Although Lo Dico does not identify his sources, he does inform the reader in the preface that his narrative is not an original invention, but rather an orderly arrangement of the same stories that had been recounted for many centuries. The better-known works utilized by Lo Dico are Tasso's *Rinaldo*, Cieco da Ferrara's *Mambriano*, Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (albeit Berni's version), Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and *Cinque canti*, Francesco Brusantino's *Angelica innamorata*, and Pulci's *Morgante*. As can be seen from the above list, *La storia dei paladini* follows the chronological order of the stories rather than the order in which the texts were written.

*La storia dei paladini's* interlaced episodes are woven together seamlessly without any indication of where one source ends and the next begins. For example, in one sentence the Spanish maiden Fiordespinga pines for the Frankish female warrior Bradamante whom she mistakes for a male knight (from Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* III.9.1-9), while the next turns to the Cathayan princess Angelica who is said to have escaped from the Christian camp (from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* I.10). The events of the *Orlando Furioso*, moreover, are directly followed by those of the *Cinque canti* as Ariosto had at one point intended. Ironically, while the "five cantos" would have represented an abrupt shift to a darker tone if published as the continuation of Ariosto's original poem, in this larger context the account of Gano's machinations and their near-disastrous results resonates with instances of his treachery elsewhere in the work and foreshadows his final betrayal of Orlando at Roncevaux which follows the version narrated in Pulci's *Morgante*.

Lodico not only restructures episodes, modifies characters, and deletes certain passages, but he also creates additional characters and weaves entirely new episodes into his comprehensive version. For example, in Tasso's *Rinaldo*, Medea predicted that noble and valorous twins would be born to the pagan Floriana from her union with

Rinaldo. After Lodico retells this episode in his own fashion, he goes on to create adventures for these twins, whom he names Carinda and Guidon Selvaggio. (Guidon Selvaggio was already present in the tradition as the illegitimate son of Rinaldo or, as Ariosto would have it, of Rinaldo's father Amone, while Carinda may have been invented by Lo Dico himself.) The adventures of Carinda and of another new character, Cladinoro, are interwoven among Lodico's retellings of Cieco da Ferrara's *Mambriano* and Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*.

Lodico explains in the preface that his goal is to combine entertainment with moral instruction. Accordingly, the narrative is regularly supplemented with inserted maxims and sayings that teach morality and popular wisdom, such as "l'ozio è amico del sonno" [idleness is a friend of sleep] (vol. vii, 79) and "chi ad altri non ha usato pietà invano la spera da altrui" [whoever has not shown compassion to others, hopes in vain to receive it in return] (vol. viii, 31). He routinely omits explicitly graphic or grotesque material, and he sometimes reshapes stories to give them greater ethical force. Yet not every insertion serves a merely didactic purpose: Lodico also devotes attention to the psychological development of characters, elaborating on their emotional responses and underlying motivations, and he peppers his interlaced account with the kind of realistic detail that readers could have expected to find in serial novels of the period.

*La storia dei paladini di Francia* was an immediate success when it was published between 1858 to 1860. Its continued popularity is attested to by Giuseppe Leggio's expanded 1895-96 edition entitled *La storia dei paladini di Francia cominciando da Re Pipino fino alla morte di Rinaldo* [The History of the Paladins of France Beginning with King Pipin until the Death of Rinaldo]. Leggio's version provided a new point of departure by including the events surrounding Charlemagne's birth and youth as related in Andrea da Barberino's *Reali di Francia*. The chronological line of epic material extended by Leggio and others eventually stretched from the conquests of Alexander of Macedonia to the period of the Crusades.

*La storia dei paladini* and its sequels became the basis for the puppet plays that were performed throughout Sicily and beyond until at least the 1950s when television in the home and other factors put an end to the tradition. Puppeteers closely followed Lodico's plot in daily performances of cycles generally lasting about a year or longer. Since, however, they could not stage Lo Dico's third-person narration directly, they created *canovacci*, or outlines, dividing each play into scenes spelling out the setting, characters, and action, and including some inserted dialogue, along with stage directions where appropriate. The Palermitan puppeteer Mimmo Cuticchio refers to a sequence of 370 plays in the repertory of his father Giacomo. Giusto Lo Dico even made his way to America with Sicilian immigrants. The most notable example perhaps is the Catanese-American puppeteer Agrippino Manteo who during the 1920s and 1930s staged a cycle consisting of 394 plays in New York City's Little Italy based on *La storia dei paladini* and its surrounding narratives. Sicilian puppeteers today still commonly refer to Lo Dico's work as their Bible even though they no longer perform plays in serial fashion.

In contrast to its unparalleled status in Sicilian popular culture, *La storia dei paladini* has been virtually ignored in mainstream academia. The folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè considered the mere act of reading it to be a somewhat Herculean undertaking and not for the faint-hearted:

I don't know who among men of letters in Sicily has ever gone through these four volumes out of simple curiosity, to see the thread of the story and the books used by the compiler: nor do I blame anyone for that, because it takes great patience, really the patience of Job, to read so many thousands of small-print pages by a man, certainly illustrious among those small-minded readers ("leggichiatori") of only one book, but little known among the lettered, with whom he never had anything to do.

Pitrè goes on to proclaim this dubious honor for himself: "Nevertheless, I have completed that arduous reading"

(351-2). Despite Pitré's attention to the work, it is only with Antonio Pasqualino that *La storia dei paladini* became a serious object of study. Pasqualino painstakingly identified the text's many medieval and Renaissance sources, also pointing out sections without known sources that could have been invented by Giusto Lodico himself (*L'opera dei pupi*, 66-68; "Il repertorio epico dell'opera dei pupi"). One of the compositional strategies noted by Pasqualino is the reconciliation of contradictions in characters whose careers span more than one source text, which thereby results in a greater sense of coherence both for readers and for the puppeteers dramatizing Lodico's version of events in extensive cycles ("Dama Rovenza dal Martello e la leggenda di Rinaldo da Montalbano").

Lodico's sources were poems written in *ottava rima* (hendecasyllable eight-verse stanzas). His process of rendering these into prose was akin to the work of the early fourteenth-century Florentine compiler Andrea da Barberino, mentioned above, and anticipated the twentieth-century authors Gianni Celati and Italo Calvino who creatively translated into prose the *Orlando Innamorato* and *Orlando Furioso*, respectively. While early editions of *La storia dei paladini di Francia* are extremely rare, Leggio's version of Lodico's work has been reprinted various times and is readily available even today. His 1902 edition was most recently reprinted in thirteen volumes (vols. I-IX, 1993, X-XIII, 2000). (Apart from the preface, which is printed only in Lodico's original text, the above citations from the *Storia dei paladini* refer to this edition, which is the most readily available.)

Two recently published works substantially advance our understanding of Giusto Lodico's massive literary accomplishment: Pasqualino's *Rerum palatinorum fragmenta* edited by Alessandro Napoli (2018) and Anna Carocci's *Il poema che cammina* (2019).

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