

**ORLANDO, JUAN, AND THE *OTTAVA RIMA* RIDE
IN PURSUIT OF NARRATIVE BLISS**

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Yet [*the poet*] had powers for embellishing his poem with pathetic descriptions as well as any poet, and knew how to move the heart to tears, even better than to excite it to laughter. For, if he can be reproached of being either vulgar, or coarse, or gross, when he means to be jovial, he wants neither delicacy, nor feeling, nor elegance when he attempts to be pathetic. The power of the poet in this respect, never appears to greater advantage than in the relation of the love of ...²

You could easily assume that the critic refers to Haidée and Juan, couldn't you? In this harsh judgment, we can recognize the reluctant admiration and prudish criticism that the publication of the first cantos of *Don Juan*, met with, and the embarrassing necessity to acknowledge both the poet's capacity to move readers to tears with beautiful feelings, and his talent for rousing vulgar laughter. This applies to Italian chivalric romance too, all these serio-comic poems written in *ottava rima* after Pulci's *Morgante*, which culminate with Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and whose last offshoots grew in the eighteenth century.³

My purpose today is to give readers of Byron some appetite for these delightful poems, made of protracted quests, long rides galloping at the pace of the *ottava rima*, and comically jumping over the repeated obstacle of its ending rhyme, always diverse and ever changing in spite of their regular rhythm. I discovered this "enchanted forest" of literature when I was studying in Italy, loved it and lost myself in it. It was shortly after reading *Don Juan* that I learned Italian by devouring these wonderfully long poems, as Byron may have done when he settled in Italy; I felt and enjoyed a strange similitude of tone and style, though the stories are so completely different. – I wish to share some of the treasures I discovered then.

*My way is to begin with the beginning.*⁴ – These correspondences first lie in a few episodes of Italian Renaissance poems that will ring bells for Byronists. While riding in the middle of a forest, Fiordespinga encounters a beautiful knight, who is deeply asleep and rouses tender feelings in her at first glance; the knight awakes and sees fair Fiordespinga, who is as lovely as an amorous young lady can be. How can one possibly remain unmoved in front of such a charming apparition? – However, Bradamante, the beautiful knight, in spite of short hair, is in fact a fair lady, who finds the situation rather embarrassing. Boiardo, the author of *Orlando Innamorato*, facetiously adds: "They were inflamed with desire for each other, / What was missing I could easily say."⁵ For Byron readers, this unmistakably evokes the famous description in *Don Juan*, "With all things ladies want, save one or two."⁶

I can imagine Peter Cochran mumbling that Byron never read Boiardo, whose *Orlando Innamorato* had not been available in print for centuries. – This is true, and Byron's harsh comment in the introduction to his translation of the first Canto of Pulci's *Morgante*, blaming Boiardo for being over-serious, shows that he never spent any time reading him.⁷ However, he probably flipped through

1: My warm thanks to Danièle Sarrat, who accepted to revise this paper, and greatly helped me with her corrections, comments, and suggestions.

2: *Orlando Innamorato di Boiardo; Orlando Furioso di Ariosto; with an Essay on the Romantic narrative poetry of the Italians; memoirs and notes by Antonio Panizzi*, London, Pickering, 1830, tome 1 page 287.

3: With Forteguerra's *Ricciardetto*.

4: DJ I st.7.

5: Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book III, canto 9, st. 25 *L'una de l'altra accesa è nel disio, / Quel che li manca ben sapre' dir io*.

6: DJ VI st.51.

7: Byron, *Morgante Maggiore of Messer Luigi Pulci*. Advertisement. "The *Morgante Maggiore*, of the first canto of which this translation is offered, divides with the *Orlando Innamorato* the honour of having formed and suggested the style and story of Ariosto. The great defects of Boiardo were his treating too seriously the narratives of chivalry, and his harsh style.

Berni,⁸ who had re-written it, with a view to softening its rough humour and polishing its language. – Now, tell me: who would ever read a re-written version of *Don Juan*, when the original one is available? – I wouldn't! That is why I devoted fifty or sixty hours to the reading of Boiardo's poem instead of Berni's. But let me to my story ...–

Bradamante, consumed with passion in return for Fiordespinga, follows her lover to her father's castle where she is introduced dressed as the woman she is. Both young ladies sleep in the same bed, to their growing frustration. The next episode of this unfulfilled love will follow in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Back to Montalbano, her family castle, Bradamante tells her twin brother Ricciardetto (who looks exactly like her) of her "unfortunate good fortune"; Ricciardetto, who had earlier met Fiordespinga and sighed in vain for her, jumps on a steed, rides to the castle, and once there explains that a fairy he rescued on his way fulfilled "her" dearest wish in return. Mistaken in the castle as the gentle lady Bradamante, Ricciardetto can happily spend day and night with Fiordespinga, who enjoys the fairy's "gift" very much. – Her great surprise is comparable to Dudù's in *Don Juan's* corresponding situation. As a third example, I would like to mention Orrigille, a beautiful and deceitful young lady, loved by Grifone, who has to leave her for some time. She waits for him for a while until she deems she cannot bear, in such a tender age, to have to sleep alone,⁹ and picks up a new lover. On his return, Grifone starts complaining, but she is prompt in counter-attacking, putting all the blame on him because of his long absence. The deceitful lady, whose deeds were worse than a fox's, carried on her quarrel so astutely, that she reverted all the guilt on Grifone ... and wove the web of her deception in such a way that Luke and John seemed less truthful¹⁰ – You do remember what Julia did when her husband was looking for her lover in her very bedroom, don't you? Isn't it here, in a similar situation, the very same sarcastic vision of the "fair sex"?!

Another pattern familiar to all Byron readers can be traced back to the Italian poems: it is the irrepressibly comic use of understatement. Here are a few examples: in Pulci's *Morgante*, an arrogant knight is unexpectedly thrown down from his horse during a fight, and impudently explains to his victor that "[he] wanted to get off [his] horse, anyway".¹¹ In *Orlando Innamorato*, the paladin Dudone, who tries to follow Astolfo into the sea, comes close to drowning, and "can ascertain the sea is salty".¹² Lastly, the first night Mandricardo spent with Doralice, after which "you could believe that they had agreed, because they awoke merrier the next morning"¹³ strikes a pleasant contrast with Juan's nocturnal "fight" against the Spirit of Norman Abbey at the beginning of Canto XVII.¹⁴

A lot has already been written on *Don Juan's* style and its congeniality with the ottava rima.¹⁵ I just wish to give a brief "catalogue" of some correspondences which have been pointed at and scrutinized. – The first item of this catalogue will of course be the art of cataloguing itself, dear to Professor Higashinaka. All readers of Italian *romanzi cavallereschi* are well aware that the long lists of knights are part of the "game" and (supposedly) part of the fun, first because of the "sport excitement",¹⁶ as

8: Remember Byron's letter to John Murray, 25 March 1818: *Croker's is a good guess – but the style is not English – it is Italian – Berni is the original of all.* – BLJ VI 24.

9: *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 15, st.102: *non le parendo ormai di più patire / ch'abbia in sì fresca età sola a dormire.*

10: *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 16, st.13: *E seguitò la donna fraudolente, / di cui l'opere fur più che di volpe, / la sua querela così astutamente, / che riversò in Grifon tutte le colpe. (...) e con tal modo sa tesser d'inganni, / che men verace par Luca e Giovanni.*

11: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 13, st.46: *io ne volevo in ogni modo scendere.*

12: Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book II, Canto 14, st. 5: *Ben sapea dir se il mare era salato.*

13: *Orlando Furioso*, canto 14, st. 63: *Creder si può che ben d'accordo furo; / che si levar più allegri la dimane.*

14: We could also mention comic formulations, which are not "understatements" strictly speaking. Ariosto (*Orlando Furioso*, canto 31, st. 71) tells us of Rodomonte and Brandimarte's duel on a bridge: they fall both into the water "searching down to the river's bottom, whether there was any beautiful nymph hidden" (... *a cercar la rivera insin al fondo, / se v'era ascosa alcuna ninfa bella.*) or, in canto 16, st. 83, of knights who, during a battle, "send some enemies to Hell, so that they can bring the latest news" (...*mandando or questo or quel giù ne l'inferno / a dar notizie del viver moderno.*)

15: I'd like to mention here Peter Vassallo's *Byron – The Italian Literary Influence*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1984, whose reading was warmly recommended to me by Timothy Webb during our conversations in Paris in January 2011. – My grateful thanks, Tim!

16: Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, a cura di Giuseppe Anceschi, Milano, Garzanti, 1978, Book II, Canto 23, st.8 nota: *Ciò che, in altre parole, per noi è noiosa elencazione, per altri, in diverse circostanze, è sottile piacere, facilmente ricostruibile nelle sue motivazioni di fondo. Si pensi, per fare un solo esempio abusato, alla folla*

Giuseppe Anceschi rightly pointed out: they play, he wrote, the same role as the presentation of players entering the pitch, by radio or TV commentators; and secondly because of the inventiveness shown by the poets in choosing the heroes' names. Byron domesticated for his own use the latter comic technique in the siege of Ismail, but neglected the comic power of repetitiveness, whereas Boiardo associated the four names of Namo's sons, Avino, Avorio, Ottone and Berlenzero no less than eight times. Ariosto took up the joke and made more fun of it by adding, in one of their four occurrences in *Orlando Furioso*, that he "cannot see one without the others",¹⁷ and established the basis for a steady joke among his followers, until Pietro de' Bardi published in Florence in 1643 a parodic poem, entitled exactly and in a single word, *Avinavoliottoneberlinghieri*. In Pulci, a list of animals embroidered on a pavilion takes up fourteen stanzas, and eleven cantos later, twenty-one more stanzas complete the list, 280 lines in total!¹⁸ – Byron cannot measure up with his predecessors in this respect, but his witty play on the names of Russian generals during the siege of Ismail is bound to derive from the Italian poems.¹⁹

The structure of the *ottava rima* with its switch from serious to comic, the frequent use of proverbs, the diversity of tones and famous digressions,²⁰ the art of double-entendre,²¹ have been amply commented upon. Some of the images borrowed by Byron have been thoroughly analysed, such as the faith placed in roast capon and good wine dear to Pulci's Margutte,²² and hinted at by Byron in Canto III.

Another narrative element efficiently used by Byron after the Italians is the comic call for authorities to give credit to the narration. Pulci, Boiardo and Ariosto invoke the half-historical half-mythical Archbishop Turpin (the supposed contemporary author of a chronicle of Charlemagne's deeds) to give an appearance of truth to their most hilarious invented episodes – and to justify some of their sub-stories, which are real digressions. As examples, Pulci introduces unbelievable knightly feats with apparently serious statements such as: "if the author of the story doesn't err",²³ or "if Turpin doesn't lie".²⁴ Byron, as is well known, assures the reader that "[he] detest[s] all fiction even in song",²⁵ so he uses Castelnau's account of the siege of Ismail, but without naming him. – "If" (says the historian here) "I could report / All that the Russians did upon this day ..."²⁶ After the Ismail episode, a hypothetical unidentified source is referred to in the same way as the Italians: "so history mentions, / Though probably much less a fact than a guess".²⁷

The next constitutive element of Italian serio-comic poems is the free intertwining of personal comments, and references to contemporary facts, contrary to classical epic. In *Morgante*, we find a few occurrences, like in the 24th Canto, where Pulci tells his readers of his own experiences of magic;²⁸ *Orlando Innamorato's* last stanza is famous for expressing an anxious cry at the calamities Italy was facing, with the arrival of Charles VIII's army;²⁹ Ariosto comments several times on the contemporary political developments, the rivalry between the Spanish and the French, Ludovico il Moro's call to the

indomenicata dei campi di calcio. La stessa che poi settimanalmente segue noiose e iterate rassegne sui giornali specializzati.

17: *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 17, st.16: Avino, Avolio, Ottone e Berlingiero, / ch'un senza l'altro mai veder non posso.

18: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 14, sts.47-60, and Canto 25, sts.31131.

19: It might refer to the catalogue of Saracen kings mustered by Agramante to invade France in *Orlando Furioso*, or to the crusaders' presentation in the first canto of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.

20: As examples of diversity of tones and digressions: *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 8, st.29: Signor, far mi convien come fa il buono / sonator sopra il suo istrumento arguto, / che spesso muta corda, e varia suono, / ricercando ora il grave, ora l'acuto. DJ III, st.96: But let me to my story: I must own, / If I have any fault, it is digression, / Leaving my people to proceed alone, / While I soliloquise beyond expression; / But these are my addresses from the throne, / Which put off business to the ensuing session: – / Forgetting each omission is a loss to / The world, not quite so great as Ariosto. And let's remember the immortal "E non saremo a tempo in Runcisvalle..." (Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 25, st.332.)

21: DJ IV st.98 ...therefore leave them [the families which rebuke the first two cantos of *Don Juan*] to the purer page / Of Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding, / Who say strange things for so correct an age ...

22: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 18 st.115 and DJ III, st.45: see Peter Cochran, *Byron and Margutte*, in *Byron Journal*, 1993, pp. 80-6, and his on-line edition of Byron's translation of the first canto of Pulci's *Morgante*.

23: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto III st.12: se l'aiutor della istoria non ciancia.

24: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto XI st.38: ... se Turpin non mente, and XII, st.43, idem.

25: DJ VI st.8.

26: DJ VII st.32.

27: DJ XV st.80.

28: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 24 st.112: Così vo discoprendo a poco a poco / ch'io sono stato al monte di Sibilla... And in Canto 28, st. 22. he reminds the reader of the recent vengeance of Lampugnani against Galeazzo Maria Sforza: Ricòrdati, lettore, del Lampognano, / e non cercar d'altro antico aiuttore ...

29: Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book III, Canto 9, st.26: Mentre che io canto, o Iddio redentore, / Vedo la Italia tutta a fiamma e a foco ...

barbaric foreigners,³⁰ and how the Este family (Ariosto's protector) copes with the situation. Byron adopts this technique, well adapted to comment incidentally on political matters, as in the scene of the assassination of Luigi dal Pinto at the door of Palazzo Guiccioli in Ravenna in December 1820.³¹ – It gives a tone, a life, a spirit, which can never be achieved by the authors who remain seriously and respectfully external to their epic poems. It is one of the most effective ways Byron found to avoid writing a “heavy” poem, instead of a “great” one. – Remember what he told Medwin: “People are always advising me to write an epic, they tell me that I shall leave no great poem behind me: – that is, I suppose they mean by great, a heavy poem, or a weighty poem; I believe they are synonymous”.³²

Besides being present in his narrative, the author also addresses his readers – or “listeners”. This is a multiseccular technique to grasp the attention, used in a systematic way in the “mediaeval verse-chronicles”, kept by the Italian Renaissance poets – and a way of joking with the reader. Pulci uses this technique throughout *Morgante* – overdoing it at times.³³ Boiardo makes fun of this kind of dialogue with the reader, for instance when he warns that his reader might well have forgotten a specific episode, as he, the author, had nearly forgotten it – and it is true that the warning comes nineteen cantos and nearly 10,000 lines after the reminded event ...³⁴ – This involvement sounds very familiar to Byron readers, who are used to being addressed as “chaste reader”, who might complain that Haidée and Juan are not married,³⁵ or who are wittily told that the promise of describing scenes of storm, battle, etc. has been fulfilled: “Reader! I have kept my word”.³⁶

And now to business. – O my gentle Juan!³⁷ – After this catalogue of ingredients which Byron adapted for his own use, I would like to mention two other elements he borrowed from the Italians, and which seem to have been less commented upon. (Hop! Hop! – I need to hurry up my ride) – The first element is this most surprising rhyme, used by Byron as a challenge to all classical critics, that breath-taking “warb-/le” (warble) cut in the middle like the throat of a giant by the sword of a paladin. Let's have a look at stanza 75 of the twelfth canto:

Her voice, – Byron speaks of a “fair Briton”, one of those whom Juan “didn't think pretty at the first blush” –

Her voice, though sweet, is not so fit to warb-
le those bravuras (which I still am learning
To like, though I have been seven years in Italy,
And have, or had, an ear that served me prettily).

In this passage Byron pays tribute to the virtuosity of the Italian language and poetry, and uses one of the most brilliant “tricks” he could think of to express his admiration. I do not know whether this rhyming technique has been widely used in English poetry before Byron, but I can surely say that it echoes two occurrences in *Orlando Furioso*, and is a devoted homage to Italian Renaissance poetry. Towards the end of his *Furioso*, Ariosto ventured to chop words and make the inside of them rhyme

30: *Orlando Furioso*, canto 40, st.40: *sa ben quanto è a mal termine e a mal porto, / e come spesso invan sospira e geme / chiunque il regno suo si lascia torre, / e per soccorso a' barbari ricorre.* – And Ariosto makes his thought explicit in st.41: *al tempo nostro Ludovico il Moro.*

31: Luigi dal Pinto, the military commandant of Ravenna, was assassinated just outside Palazzo Guiccioli on 9 Dec. 1820, as reported in Byron's letters (BLJ VII 245-7, to Thomas Moore and to John Murray) and in *Don Juan* V sts.33-9. See Paul Curtis, *Death (and Life) by Digression: Byron and the assassination of Luigi Dal Pinto*, in *Lord Byron “Correspondence(s)”*, XXXIInd International Byron Conference Paris, La Sorbonne, June 2006. (F.-X. de Guibert, 2008).

32: Cited in Jerome McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, London, John Murray, 1976, p.52.

33: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 2, st.15: *non domandar quanto desio l'accese.* – In a note of the 1989 Garzanti edition of *Morgante*, Davide Puccini comments: “Di queste espressioni in funzione tra conativa e fática, tendenti cioè ad agire nel destinatario e a mantenere il contatto con chi legge o chi ascolta, ce ne sono molte altre: prima di tutto pensa (cfr. XIV, 67), la più frequente negli ultimi cinque canti; ed inoltre déi pensar (III, 74), guarda (VII, 59), or pensi ognun (X, 47), vedi (X, 102), né creder (XVI, 24), or udirete (XVIII, 155) ecc.”

34: Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book III, Canto 5, st.48: *Scordato a voi debbe esser de legiero, / Ché io che lo scrissi, lo ramento apena.* – His reference is to Book II, canto 17, st. 31 et sq. almost 9,500 lines before.

35: DJ III st.12: *Haidee and Juan were not married, but / The fault was theirs, not mine: it is not fair, / Chaste reader, then, in any way to put / The blame on me, unless you wish they were; / Then if you'd have them wedded, please do shut / The book which treats of this erroneous pair, / Before the consequences grow too awful; / 'Tis dangerous to read of loves unlawful.*

36: DJ VIII st.138.

37: DJ XII st.23.

with the end of another word, but he does so exceptionally, twice only, in Cantos XLI³⁸ and XLIII.³⁹ It is no coincidence if Ariosto dared this kind of highly risky poetical “somersault” precisely there. First, in the description of how Fiordiligi finely embroiders her lover’s plain black surcoat in black: it is an exquisite and inconspicuous refinement, which is mirrored by Ariosto’s subtle division of the word *sopra/vesti*, *sur/coat*, just like *warb/le* in Byron’s stanza. The second time is when a fairy explains to a desperate lover, how to conquer his beloved and gives him precise guidelines, and it is the word “*precisa/mente*”, which is “*precise-ly*”, divided into two parts. – I would have loved to find an allusion to Byron’s reading of Ariosto while he was writing *Don Juan*’s twelfth canto, but there is none I could discover in his letters during the months when he was composing it.⁴⁰ Yet, in my opinion, Byron deliberately chose the very stanza where he celebrates and exalts the Italian language to use this most risky of all rhyming tricks; here, he shows in a subtle way what Don Juan owes to Ariosto’s virtuosity.⁴¹ –

Much has been said about the structure of the stanza, whose apparent seriousness reaches comic effects in the last two lines. This is so obvious that it seems to be the “stamp” the ottava rima is coined with – and so it is, in most cases. The second element Byron borrowed from the Italians is the irresistibly comic enjambment from the end of a stanza to the beginning of the next one. – Let’s take two examples in Pulci: in Canto XII of *Morgante*, Pulci tells us of fair Chiariella, overwhelmingly happy to see Orlando again; the author adds: “the young lady with great tenderness ran at once to Orlando and embraced him, who (to tell the truth) was not displeased at all...” – A sweet understatement at the end of the stanza ... – Immediately completed by the next line, even more comic “...and Rinaldo would have been even less displeased”.⁴² A second example: in the tragic scene where the hateful traitor Gano uses noble speech to conceal his schemes against Orlando and the Christian knights, Pulci tells us that “what he says touches [*Charlemagne*] in the depths of his heart, as it sounds as if Saint Matthew is speaking through his mouth, [*end of the stanza*] and also Luke and Mark and John and then Christ.”⁴³ This is exactly the comic “stanza enjambment” that Byron uses in Canto XIII of *Don Juan*: ...the passport shrouds / The *passée* and the past; for good Society / Is no less famed for tolerance than piety, – // That is, up to a certain point, which point / Forms the most difficult in punctuation.⁴⁴ – This technique – or trick – is clearly borrowed from Pulci, as neither Boiardo nor Ariosto use it. It reveals the deep poetical “brotherhood” Byron felt with Italian ottava rima poetry as he was working on his own poem, which he left unfinished after “barely” 16,000 lines.⁴⁵

This leads me to say a few words about the “structure” of *Don Juan*, considered from the point of view of the Italian poems. – *Don Juan* is just over half the length of *Morgante*, less than half the length of *Orlando Innamorato* and hardly 40% of the 39,000 lines⁴⁶ of *Orlando Furioso*, which is itself a sequel of *Orlando Innamorato*. Byron was not joking when he told his reader: “I thought, at setting off, about two dozen / Cantos would do; but at Apollo’s pleading, / If that my Pegasus should not be founder’d, / I think to canter gently through a hundred.”⁴⁷ Compared with his Italian models, Byron left

38: *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 41, st.32: *Fece la donna di sua man le sopra- / vesti a cui l’arme converrian più fine, / de’ quai l’osbergo il cavallier si cuopra, / e la groppa al cavallo e ’l petto e ’l crine. / Ma da quel dì che cominciò quest’opra, / continuando a quel che le diè fine, / e dopo ancora, mai segno di riso / far non potè, né d’allegrezza in viso.*

39: *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 43, st.105: *E seguitò narrandogli in che guisa / alla sua donna vuol che s’appresenti; / dico come vestir, come precisa- / mente abbia a dir, come la prieghi e tenti; / e che forma essa vuol pigliar, devisa; / che fuor che ’l giorno ch’erra tra serpenti, / in tutti gli altri si può far, secondo / che più le pare, in quante forme ha il mondo.*

40: According to Byron’s letter to John Murray, 9 Oct 1822 (BLJ X12), Canto X of *Don Juan* was completed at that date; Byron’s letter to Kinnaid, 9 Dec 1822 (BLJ X 51), informs us that Canto XII of *Don Juan* was by then completed. According to Norman Page, *A Byron Chronology*, Boston, G.K. Hall & Co, 1988, there is no sign of Byron reading Ariosto or Tasso, in the months he was writing the funny “*warb-/le*”.

41: Note that Torquato Tasso remembered in the *Gerusalemme Liberata* that he had learned how to play the trick too, and that Byron might be alluding to him instead.

42: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 12, sts.79-80 – *La damigella con gran tenerezza / corse abbracciare Orlando incontante, / ch’a dire il vero non gli spiacque niente; // e men saria dispiaciuto a Rinaldo...*

43: Pulci, *Morgante*, Canto 24, sts.33-4 – *e cio che e dice, in mezzo il cor gli tocca, / che par che gli esca san Matteo di bocca // e Luca e Marco e Giovanni e poi Cristo.*

44: DJ XIII sts.80-1.

45: With a less comic goal, Byron had already used this technique (I sts.133-4), to make the reader think upon life and death: *Few mortals know what end they would be at, / But whether glory, power, or love, or treasure, / The path is through perplexing ways, and when / The goal is gain’d, we die, you know – and then – // What then? – I do not know, no more do you.*

46: Exactly 38,736 lines.

47: DJ XII st.55.

behind a linear poem, made of few episodes, with a very limited number of characters, and a story which is rather simple to summarize. The ottava rima poems have a great ability to develop by a kind of organic growth;⁴⁸ the adjunction of new characters can easily develop into unexpected new episodes. Let us keep in mind that Mandricardo appears at the beginning of Book III of *Orlando Innamorato*, “only” after 30,000 lines, that is to say nearly twice as many as the whole of *Don Juan*. This character is an absolute prodigy, without whom a large part of *Orlando Furioso* would not exist. An ottava rima poem is really a ride in an enchanted realm, at the unstoppable pace of its stanza. In his *Essay on the Romantic narrative poetry of the Italians*, of 1830, Antonio Panizzi remarks that Francesco Bello, the author of the *Mambriano*, “was engaged upon it (sic) till he died; and who can tell what additions he would have made to it?”⁴⁹ – Who knows, who can guess which character Byron could have invented, in the English cantos, or after them, somewhere in France, or maybe in Italy? We can only try to imagine and dream of the unwritten cantos!

But en avant!⁵⁰ – On with the horses! ... / Tramp, tramp, o’er pebble, and splash, splash, through puddle ...⁵¹ – Otherwise, you might tell me that my ottava rima ride is not a ride and that you didn’t feel the narrative bliss at all! In a critical article, Charles Nodier wrote that “Byron sang to himself nearly all his beautiful lines on a horse galloping like Mazeppa’s”.⁵² And although Byron discovered the power of the *ottava rima* too late to write *Mazeppa* with this rhythm, it seemed so well justified for a breath-taking ride that Ariotti chose to use it in 1847 in his translation of the poem into Italian.⁵³

The time has come to disclose the origin of the quotation at the beginning of this paper. It would have been appropriate for the episode of Haidée and Juan, but it was, actually, a statement by Panizzi referring to Pulci and Morgante’s episode of Forisena and Ulivieri.⁵⁴ In the same *Essay* of 1830,⁵⁵ Panizzi writes of Ariosto’s “playful familiarity” and “elegant carelessness”,⁵⁶ two expressions which would fit Byron’s style in *Don Juan* as well. Although Panizzi refers to Ferrai’s death in Forteguerri’s *Ricciardetto*, the next quotation could conclude a criticism of Canto 100 of *Don Juan*: “He died at last, leaving it doubtful whether he regretted more the having sinned, or the being unable to sin any longer...”⁵⁷

48: This is demonstrated by the proliferation of narrative poems in *ottava rima* in Italian literature.

49: *Orlando Innamorato di Bojardo: Orlando Furioso di Ariosto: with an Essay on the romantic narrative poetry of the Italians*; memoirs, and notes by Antonio Panizzi. London, William Pickering, 1830-4, p.362.

50: DJ XVI st.86.

51: DJ X st.71.

52: Charles Nodier, in an article published in the *Musée des Familles*, reprinted by Frédéric Hennebert in a small volume entitled *Une corbeille de rognures*, Tournai, 1836 (40 copies only): « Byron s’est chanté presque tous ses beaux vers sur un cheval poussé au galop comme celui de Mazeppa. » (p. xliv).

53: *Il Mazeppa di Lord Byron, versione dall’originale inglese di A. Ariotti sull’edizione di Londra John Murray, Albemarle Street 1837*. Palermo, Stamperia e Lig. di Domenico Lo Bianco, via Alloro num. 92, 1847.

54: Panizzi, op.cit., p.287.

55: Ibid, first volume of the nine-volume set.

56: Ibid, p.409.

57: Ibid, p.405.