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ALESSANDRO GIAMMEI

**QUOTING THE “ORLANDO INNAMORATO” TO
MUSSOLINI: ALFREDO PANZINI AND FASCIST
RE-USES OF BOIARDO**

In Italian, *avere la citazione pronta* means being able to comment on anything (and escape any awkward situation) with the right quotation,¹ and *citazionismo* is a widespread technical term for postmodern anachronisms in visual art.² However, in Italy, the culture of quoting was divorced from mere pedantry and *passéism* long before postmodernity. If anything, a mnemonic dexterity with quotations has been a symptom of credibility and wit – indeed, of originality – among modern (and modernist) Italians. Even the founder of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, opened his first epic

¹ See F. Pierangeli, 1907. “*La lanterna di Diogene*”. Alfredo Panzini, in *I cento romanzi italiani del Novecento (1901-1995)*, presentazione di G. Raboni, Roma, Fazi, 1996, p. 7: “Per ogni dove, Panzini ha la citazione pronta, e in questa rivincita della letteratura gli sono compagni soprattutto Ariosto e Boiardo”.

² Sebastiano Vassalli defined *citazionismo* with scorn, as the main international esthetic during “i banali anni Ottanta”: a neo-baroque non-style that dominated art and made Italian writers extraneous to their own time. See S. Vassalli, *Citazionismo*, in Id., *Il neoitaliano: le parole degli anni Ottanta*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1991, p. 40.

poem with quotations from Dante and Edgar Allan Poe.³ Paradoxically, he later exhibited those quotations as credentials when critics accused Futurism of being derivative. “Long before Bergson,” he pointed out in a 1912 article, “these two creative geniuses coincided with my own temperament”.⁴ The ultra-modern, anti-classic new grammar of Marinetti’s avant-garde movement, so eager to burn bridges with the tradition, was authorized by a few well selected lines from masterpieces of the past: the *Divine Comedy* and *The Colloquy of Monos and Una* (which in turn, it should be noted, was opened by a proto-Futurist quotation from Sophocles, “Μελλοντα ταυτα” or “these things are in the future”).

It is no surprise that a vanguardist from Italy would resort to literary quotations in order to fend off the accusation of copying a philosopher. In a culture so rooted, at least throughout the last century, in the national uniformity of curricula and in the idea that philology is the cornerstone of any education, those who had their quotations ‘always ready’ (including Futurists) tended to draw them from literary classics, not the wisdom of contemporary thinkers. One could say that *citazionismo*, before becoming a trend in postmodern painting and architecture, was a form of intellectual self-fashioning through literary memory, a way to present one’s identity and select one’s interlocutors through the filter of a mutually familiar system of reference. After all, quotations establish a code that requires a shared library to be cracked. They define a community and allow its members to speak a secret language based on common reading experiences.

³ Specifically from *Paradiso*, XI,1-3 and from E. A. Poe, *The Colloquy of Monos and Una* in Id., *Tales*, London, Wiley & Putnam, 1846, p. 101. Both quotes are inscribed in the frontispiece of F. T. Marinetti, *La Conquête des Étoiles : Poème Épique*, Paris, Sansot, 1902.

⁴ F. T. Marinetti, *A Response to Objections*, in *Futurism: An Anthology*, edited by L. Rainey, C. Poggi, and L. Wittman, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 125.

This essay is about a masterful *citazionista* of the twentieth century, Alfredo Panzini: he was fluent in the code of quotations, and used them, as his weapon of choice, in a personal battle between literature and reality, favouring chivalric poetry in particular. It would be easy to describe him as a modern Don Quixote. However, Panzini himself would refuse the parallel, arguing that Miguel de Cervantes, in all his greatness, was merely (and knowingly) an imitator of a previous, much less appreciated poet: Matteo Maria Boiardo. In fact, one of Panzini's less visible but, in retrospect, most impactful and impressive contributions to Italian culture, was his attempt to revive Boiardo's authority, among common readers and non-specialists, as the principal ancestor of Europe's chivalric epic – which is to say, from the perspective of twentieth-century Romance criticism, of modern narrative tout court.⁵

From the beginning of the century until his death in 1939, Panzini obstinately advocated for a restoration of Boiardo's role in the canon as the fountainhead of adventurous storytelling, a model for the idealistic appreciation of lost traditional values, and a creative user of peripheral (but noble, and eloquent) variants of the Italian language.⁶ He did so through works of both fiction and divulgation, in spite of a general academic and popular predilection for Boiardo's literary heirs: from Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso to Edmund Spenser and Cervantes. This single-minded commitment to the untimeliness and forgotten importance of the *Orlando*

⁵ The idea that, through Cervantes, the narrative model of Italian chivalric poems generated modern European novels was common in non-anglo-centric histories of literature, and is still present in accounts of the development of the genre by continental theorists. See Th. Pavel, *Il romanzo alla ricerca di se stesso. Saggio di morfologia storica*, in *Il romanzo*, a cura di F. Moretti, vol. II: *Le Forme*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001, pp. 35-63 and A. Berardinelli, *L'incontro con la realtà*, ibidem, pp. 341-381.

⁶ For a general analysis of Panzini's revival of Boiardo, see A. Giammei, *(Quick)Silver Masters: Modern and Post-Modern Revivals of Quattrocento Chivalric Poems*, in "Italian Studies", LXXIV, 2, 2019, pp. 215-217.

Innamorato mirrored Panzini's own self-positioning as an anti-modern modernist, incapable of acclimating in his own century, perpetually on the threshold between nostalgia and newness – and convinced of being tragically destined, like his fifteenth-century model, to be ransacked and overshadowed by more successful, younger imitators. Quotations, as I will show, were not only a crucial resource in Panzini's life-long campaign to unearth and disseminate Boiardo's legacy. They progressively became, particularly in the fascist years, intransitive talismans: a tool-set of relics able to alter the traumatic linear progress of time and correct literary injustices.

Through a few selected cases, my analysis will encompass most of Panzini's creative life, from his early works to his last novel, offering a taxonomy of his literary and argumentative uses of quotations from the *Orlando Innamorato*. I will start, however, from a late episode. As my title suggests, I will focus on how Panzini awkwardly tried to position Boiardo in the cultural landscape of fascist Italy – and, specifically, in his own take on Mussolini, who picked him as a founding member of the Accademia d'Italia in 1929. This intriguing and revealing case-study defines the trajectory of Panzini's faith in the power of quotations, dividing his efforts to promote the memory of Boiardo into two distinct phases. It also allows me to immediately frame Panzini as an influential fascist celebrity, dispelling the claim that he should be re-evaluated as an ultimately independent and isolated (or even secretly anti-fascist) intellectual.⁷

⁷ The most significant effort to revive scholarly attention towards Panzini in the (relatively) recent past was a conference, whose proceedings were introduced by Carlo Bo: *Alfredo Panzini nella cultura letteraria italiana fra '800 e '900*, Atti del convegno nazionale (Bellaria – Igea Marina, 17-19 marzo 1983), a cura di E. Grassi, Rimini, Maggioli, 1985. Drawing on Bo's authoritative lecture, the foundation Accademia Panziniana published an editorial that claims that Panzini has been forgotten because of an unjust *damnatio memoriae* perpetrated by anti-fascist critics (Benedetto Croce, Piero Gobetti, and Antonio Gramsci in particular): see *Panzini epurato*, web address

Beyond its specific object of investigation, this essay is ultimately about the currency of an anomalous classic in the cultural economy of fascist Italy: a context in which newness and tradition, originality and homologation, had to somehow coexist.

Before I start, I should briefly explain why it is worth to dig up Panzini in order to study fascist re-uses of Boiardo and, more in general, late modern Italian practices of quotation. Coeval writers who stood more successfully the test of time, like Gabriele D'Annunzio and Alberto Savinio, certainly read the *Orlando Innamorato* and were inspired by Boiardo.⁸ Quotation, as the case of Marinetti shows, was a widespread practice among much more visible and influential protagonists of Italy's modernism. So why focus on Alfredo Panzini? After all, eighty years after his death, the name of this pupil of Giosue Carducci is likely to sound arcane even to the ears of most italianists.

I already implicitly mentioned two reasons why Panzini's case is interesting for a study of modern quotations of Boiardo. The first is that, during his life, Panzini was both a renowned academic and a very acclaimed writer, widely read in Italy and relevant abroad.⁹ His work was not addressed to a few scholars, but it was also not just popular

www.alfredopanzini.it/panzini_epurato.html. Though usually less explicit, the relativization of Panzini's fascism is not uncommon in postwar criticism of his work.

⁸ In the early twentieth century, D'Annunzio planned to collaborate with Pietro Mascagni on an opera adaptation of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*: see R. Flury, *Pietro Mascagni: A Bio-Bibliography*, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 158. One of Savinio's early novels, *Angelica o la notte di maggio* (1927) is, at the same time, a rewriting of the fable of Eros and Psyche and of passages of the *Innamorato*, drawing on Ovid, Ariosto, Apuleius, and Boiardo. I plan to return on Savinio's relationship with Boiardo's *Angelica* in a future essay.

⁹ During his life, Panzini's work had a strong international echo, and his stories and essays appeared, in translation, in popular prestigious publications – for instance, see A. Panzini, *The Flapper – A New Type*, in “Vanity Fair,” September 1921, p. 63. For the impact of Panzini in European and American culture, see *Panzini scrittore europeo*, a cura di M. Lando, Bologna, Pendragon, 2014, in particular M. A. McDonald Carolan, *Panzini in America*, ibidem, pp. 23-37.

entertainment. Today, it offers a posthumous glimpse into a sort of mainstream but credible ‘mid-brow’ literary culture of the early twentieth century.

The second reason is that Panzini’s relationship with Boiardo was unique in the context of modern Italian culture. No one worked as much as Panzini to vindicate the *Orlando Innamorato* in the twentieth century, and no author offers a better key to interpret his rapport with the past than Boiardo. Any investigation of Boiardo’s post-Romantic afterlife, at least in the Italian context, should start from Panzini’s oeuvre. I am going to add a third reason to conclude this introductory section.

The experience of a fascist writer like Panzini shows how ideologically risky it is to deal with quintessentially Boiardesque concepts and sentiments like nostalgia, humanism, chivalry, and honor. Rather than representing a neutral act of trans-historical homage or literary archaeology and preservation, quoting an author like Boiardo (and even identifying with him) can turn into a form of appropriation and colonization of poetic legacies: a fascist presentification of the past.¹⁰ Panzini shows us that those who have their quotations ‘always ready’ can use them to manipulate texts, making poems say things that would have horrified their authors. While any form of reception is a free creative action, quotations bear an aura of objectivity and faithfulness that makes them particularly insidious when used to co-opt poetry in social and political projects. The episode from which I am starting – Panzini’s catalog of Mussolinian values in the *Innamorato* through a group of de-contextualized lines – is an example of this tendentious use of literary quotations.

¹⁰ I am adopting this term from Rik Peters’ critique of fascist distortions of Giovanni Gentile’s actualism – whose philosophy of history, it should be noted, was explained through the analysis of his personal trans-historical appreciation of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. See R. Peters, *Actes de présence: Presence in Fascist Political Culture*, in “History and Theory”, XLV, 3, 2006, pp. 362-374.

1. *Fascist Boiardo?*

For less than a year, Benito Mussolini personally owned the only copy of the oldest surviving edition of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*. It was – and still is – among the rarest books in the world. Mussolini received it as a gift, in the May of 1932,¹¹ from one of the greatest dealers and collectors of antique books of the twentieth century, Tammaro De Marinis. This legendary Neapolitan bibliographer and book historian was a close friend of Benedetto Croce, the leader of Italy's anti-fascist intellectuals and, incidentally, a merciless critic of Panzini's work. While openly liberal, like Croce, De Marinis was part of a circle of mostly fascist Neo-Humanist bibliophiles that intended to revive the international appreciation (and trade) of Italy's printed treasures through publicly sponsored initiatives, events, and editorial endeavors.¹² This group was led by a powerful fascist intellectual, Ugo Ojetti, and had managed, in 1924, to purchase and bring to Modena the invaluable manuscript of Borso d'Este's Bible, thanks in part to the intercession of notable fascist politicians.

It is safe to assume that, through his precious gift, De Marinis was seeking the favor of the regime. He needed to persuade Mussolini that antique editions could have a role in the fascistization of culture: that rare fifteenth-century volumes, with their hand-pressed yellow pages and

¹¹ As recorded in a letter from De Marinis to Ugo Ojetti on May the 24th, 1932. The document, unpublished, is preserved in the archive of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, Italy (deposito Archivio Storico, Ugo Ojetti, Corrispondenza, Cassetta 25).

¹² In 1924 and 1926, De Marinis had gained fame through two international endeavors: the mentioned 'return' of Borso d'Este's Bible to the library of the city of Modena and a seminal *Exposition du livre italien* in Paris. For more detailed information, see P. Scapecchi, *Il gusto dei libri*, in *Parole figurate. I libri d'artista dei Cento Amici del Libro*, a cura di S. Parmiggiani, Milano, Skira, 2009, p. 17.

sophisticated artisanal bindings, had something to do with his imperial, industrial, totalitarian vision of the nation. However, considering this end, the means employed by De Marinis may seem quite odd. Why would Boiardo, the noble count of Scandiano, be the right tool to convince Mussolini that old books had something to do with his new fascist Italy? Why would an erudite collector such as De Marinis, fluent in the symbolic language of incunabula and uniquely able to access virtually any known book, choose the *Orlando Innamorato* to ingratiate the duce?

We know that, while perplexing, the choice proved to be spot-on, since the gift was evidently a success. After receiving it, Mussolini demonstrated his sympathy towards De Marinis by choosing his Florentine villa, in 1934, to meet with the Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg,¹³ and the regime continued to support bibliophile initiatives sponsored by De Marinis in the following years.¹⁴ In March 1933, while nazis were starting to publicly burn books in Germany, Mussolini donated the edition of the *Innamorato* that he received from De Marinis to the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice – where it still is, bearing De Marinis’ signature on the *verso* of the first *carta*. The duce, showing to appreciate at least the most obvious symbolism of the gift, gave it to the Marciana in order to celebrate the illustrious legacy of Venetian presses – the incunabulum had in fact been printed in Venice, in 1487, by Piero de’ Piasi. It was a repatriation of sorts.

As I said, it is hard to believe that a collector with dozens of unique pieces at his disposal would set on an early edition of Boiardo just because

¹³ On this episode, see L. M. Personè, *Il gallo non canterà: personaggi, fatti, curiosità*, Milan, Edizioni del Palazzo, 1987, p. 143.

¹⁴ For instance, the group of prominent bibliophiles that De Marinis was part of coalesced, in the late 1930s, in the publicly sponsored initiative *I cento amici del libro* (which is still active today). See A. Giammei, *L’Aminta dell’Officina Bodoni: Un libro rinascimentale alle soglie della seconda guerra mondiale*, in “Nuova informazione bibliografica”, I, 14, 2015, pp. 185-191.

of its rarity and commercial value. Was geography, then, the right key to decrypt the meaning of De Marinis' gift to Mussolini? Maybe the Venetian edition of an Emilian poet was meant to allude to Mussolini's own proud origins in the Emilia Romagna region, and to symbolize the centrality of Venice in the history of both nationalism and books in Italy. The propaganda that welcomed the donation of the *Innamorato* to the Marciana library adopted this perspective, highlighting the glory of Venice as the Renaissance capital of bookmaking as well as its region's (then relatively recent) Italianization after a century of foreign dominion. Boiardo's poetry did not seem to interest commentators. While a large part of the main article that came out in "Gazzetta di Venezia" to announce the donation was devoted to the Renaissance poet, it did not praise his work. On the contrary, the journalist claimed that "tutti gli storici della nostra letteratura sono concordi nel rilevare nel poema del Boiardo povertà di stile, versi duri e stentati ed altri numerosi difetti".¹⁵ The article insisted, instead, on Boiardo's biographic merits in the Po valley of the fifteenth century, and in particular on the Italianness that, according to the journalist, he demonstrated throughout his life and in his books – one of the headlines was "*Un bel tipo d'Italiano*", an untranslatable pun that plays on the same ambiguity, between typography and personality, of English words like type or character.

What complicates the interpretation of De Marinis' gesture is the fact that, in the early 1930s, Boiardo was systematically erased from fascist revivals of Italy's chivalric Renaissance literature. In 1932, when Mussolini received the *Innamorato*, and in 1933, when he gave it to the Marciana, fascist cultural propaganda was invested in the appropriation of Ariosto.

¹⁵ C. Viviani, *Il dono del duce alla Marciana: L'esemplare unico dell'Orlando Innamorato del 1486*, in "Gazzetta di Venezia", 8 marzo 1933, p. 4.

The city of Ferrara, in particular, was organizing a spectacular festival for the fifth centennial anniversary of Ariosto's death, which was broadly advertised in Italy and abroad.¹⁶ Mussolini personally revised and approved the budget in July 1932, and had involved the Accademia d'Italia in the initiatives.¹⁷ Among many artistic, athletic, and literary events planned in honor of the *Furioso* and its author, the program included a national convention of librarians and bibliographers to be held exactly on the day of the anniversary of Ariosto's death.

Two very visible products of these Ariostean celebrations are emblematic of how Boiardo's legacy was overshadowed and even actively cancelled by intellectuals and propagandists. The first, and most obvious, is the fresco that Ferrara's mayor commissioned in 1933, at the end of the Ariostean centenary, to celebrate the new Renaissance of the city in Mussolini's Italy. Completed a few years later, this Neo-Humanist fascist mural still adorns the Sala dell'Arengo, one of the most important spaces in the Ducal Castle – Ferrara's city hall. It depicts the city's glory through the myths and stories that defined it, from the dragon slayed by its patron, Saint George, to the tragic love story of Ugo d'Este and Parisina Malatesta. An entire wall of the room is reserved for chivalric epic, the most prestigious contribution that the city, through the patronage of its Renaissance dukes, gave to the history of western culture. On that wall, evenly split between scenes from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, there is no trace of Boiardo. Even the papers that document the

¹⁶ A detailed analysis of this event is the object of an entire chapter in my forthcoming monograph on Ariosto in the Machine Age.

¹⁷ The document with Mussolini's autograph annotations is preserved in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome: *Celebrazione del IV Centenario della Morte di Lodovico Ariosto. Schema di Programma* (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. 1931-1933. Fascicolo 14.2 / 3237). For a summary of the exchange between Ferrara, Mussolini, and the Accademia d'Italia, see D. Ghirardo, *Città Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle*, in "Journal of Contemporary History", XXXI, 2, 1996, pp. 347-372.

artist's process, in dialogue with the commissioning committee and other local notables, insist on the importance of chivalric poems for an ideal portrait of Ferrara's culture but fail to mention Boiardo's *Innamorato* at all.¹⁸

The second emblematic product of the centenary that actively erased Boiardo involved Panzini. It was a book, titled *L'Ottava d'Oro*, edited by Panzini's friend Antonio Baldini, and published by Mondadori in 1933.¹⁹ It contained the transcriptions of a series of lectures that were held, throughout the five years that preceded Ariosto's centenary, in Ferrara, and were meant to prepare the local population for the celebrations while attracting national attention on the imminent Ariostean year. Besides literary critics and professors, many fascist celebrities were invited to speak – from Marinetti, who gave a talk about the intrinsic Futurism of the *Furioso*, to the minister of aviation, the Ferrarese hierarch Italo Balbo, who spoke about Astolfo's flight on the moon and compared hippogriffs and airplanes. The only speaker who insisted on the importance of Boiardo's influence on Ariosto was Panzini, who was invited, in 1931, to speak about Angelica, a central character in both the *Innamorato* and the *Furioso*. His lecture, however, was not included in the proceedings. It was, in fact, the only lecture excluded from the final book. The hostility of the editor towards Boiardo's legacy (evidently considered off topic) forced Panzini to publish his essay on Angelica elsewhere. In doing so, Panzini denounced,

¹⁸ See L. Scardino, *Un artista ferrarese alla ricerca dei Miti*, in Id., *Achille Funi e il "Mito di Ferrara"*, Prefazione di F. Quilici, Ferrara, Belriguardo, 1985, pp. 15-40.

¹⁹ See *L'Ottava d'Oro. La vita e l'opera di Ludovico Ariosto. Letture tenute in Ferrara per il quarto centenario della morte del poeta, con due messaggi di G. D'Annunzio*, Milano, Mondadori, 1933.

humorously but openly, the injustice of Boiardo's erasure during the Ariostean celebrations.²⁰

In sum, in 1933 Panzini knew for a fact that his love for Boiardo, demonstrated through lectures and publications for over twenty years, was not shared by his fellows fascist intellectuals. However, rather than discouraging his divulgative efforts, this situation clearly excited them. The expulsion from *L'Ottava d'oro* proceedings inspired him to work on an expansion of his Ferrarese lecture: a longer essay, on both Boiardo and Ariosto, that he published as a series of articles in the prestigious literary journal "Nuova Antologia".²¹ Its title was *La bella storia di Orlando "innamorato" prima che diventasse "furioso"*. Its declared purpose was to hijack a moment of national enthusiasm for Ariosto in order to re-establish what Panzini believed to be a self-evident historical truth: that the *Innamorato* was the literary father of the *Furioso* (and of any later experiment in chivalric epic), and that, therefore, any celebration of Ariosto had to coincide with a new appreciation of Boiardo. On the year of the Ariostean centenary, Panzini collected the "Nuova Antologia" articles in the volume *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*.²² Thanks to the general attention for Ariosto, this book was a success, and it still is Panzini's most reprinted and available work.

It was while he was writing this essay that Panzini learned that Mussolini had received the precious Venetian edition of the *Innamorato* and had given it to the Marciana library. Unlike the commentators in

²⁰ See A. Panzini, *Angelica regina del Catajo*, in "La Lettura", XXXIII, Maggio 1933, pp. 497-515.

²¹ See Id., *La bella storia di Orlando "innamorato" prima che diventasse "furioso"*, in "Nuova Antologia", CCCLXVII-CCCLXVIII, aprile-maggio 1933, pp. 481-499 and pp. 14-39.

²² See Id., *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*, Milano, Mondadori, 1933.

“Gazzetta di Venezia”, he could not reduce the symbolism of such a gift to mere questions of editorial provenance and generic Italianness. The fact that the duce had owned a Boiardesque relic, which he considered worthy of a pilgrimage as much as the author’s ancestral castle in Scandiano,²³ gave Panzini an opportunity to directly link the *Innamorato* to fascism. In his *La bella storia di Orlando*, he asked himself the same question from which this section started: why Boiardo? He answered it, as I mentioned, through a series of quotations:

“A un Capo di Governo, a un uomo di Stato, che vuole il suo popolo ardito e forte, deve essere piaciuto molto questo libro, non per quelle fole d’amore e per quelle fantasie, ma perché spesso si incontrano sentenze di tale virile natura, e tanto più notevoli in quanto il Boiardo non si è mai proposto di tediare i suoi ascoltatori con sentenze moraleggianti, e più notevoli sentenze ancora, perché [...] l’animo di lui era disposto al compatimento e al perdono. [...] Alcune di queste sentenze, quali mi vengono a mente, sono: ‘Perché ogni cosa vince l’omo forte’, ‘Che la fatica è pasto all’animoso’, ‘Ogni cosa virtute vince al fine’, ‘Chi può durare, al fin vince ogni cosa’.”²⁴

A passionate and true reader like Panzini could not pretend that the *Innamorato* was, in general, a book about virile heroism. If anything, read as a whole, Boiardo’s poem is rather anti-Mussolinian. It is not, I mean, a poem about strongmen. Its heroes cry, abandon their leaders to follow their hearts, and forge alliances with strangers. Their ethnic, religious, and sexual diversity is explored with curiosity, beyond the simplistic paradigms of early modern orientalism,²⁵ and their stories challenge the militaristic unidirectionality of traditional Carolingian epic. Carefully selected

²³ See *ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁴ *Ibidem*. 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. 925 (II, iv, 65, 8), p. 1033 (II, viii, 55, 1), p. 1036 (II, viii, 61, 2), p. 1037 (II, viii, 63, 6).

²⁵ See J. A. Cavallo, *The World Beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2013.

quotations were the only rhetorical option to keep Boiardo true to the letter of his text while juxtaposing him to Mussolini. Panzini called these quotations “sentenze eroiche”²⁶ and offered a catalog of them to corroborate the idea that Mussolini must have liked the *Innamorato* very much.

2. *Quantity vs. Quality Quotations*

We may never be able to entirely understand the reason why De Marinis chose Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato* to seduce Mussolini into the world of antique books. However, it is rather unlikely that he had in mind the virile heroism that Panzini’s four surgical quotations meticulously extracted from the poem. As a matter of fact, it is possible that De Marinis chose the 1487 edition of Boiardo as a subtle joke, encoded in aspects of the book that Mussolini (and most neophytes) could not grasp.

Yes, the *Innamorato* tells the stories of knightly heroes and heroines. However, by arranging the first great marriage of Carolingian and Arthurian traditions, Boiardo de-centered the pan-European, anti-Islamic imperialism that had characterized, enmeshed with military duty, the deeds of Orlando and the other paladins for centuries. The heroism that his poem investigates is torn between national imperatives (the protection of Paris and of the emperor, Charlemagne) and centrifugal, personal desires for love, glory, and adventure.²⁷ Strength and perseverance, the two fascist values on which Panzini’s quotations insist, are not the dominant traits of this complex heroism, which turned the two-dimensional knights of the

²⁶ A. Panzini, *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*, cit., p. 24.

²⁷ On the literary chivalry that Boiardo incarnated at its peak before Ariosto’s disenchanting deconstruction, see A. Giammei, *L’immaginario cavalleresco*, in *Il contributo italiano alla storia del pensiero. Letteratura*, a cura di G. Ferroni, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2018, pp. 78-83.

Medieval tradition into modern and contradictory characters. Desire is the real motor of the plot, and it almost invariably wins over duty. Love features, after all, in the very title of the book – and actually, in Boiardo's original version, it precedes Orlando's name.²⁸

It is also significant that De Marinis gave Mussolini an edition of the poem that did not include its third, unfinished book, and was composed in the author's original Northern vernacular. The localism of Boiardo's language was one of the reasons why Ariosto's continuation surpassed its fame so quickly. The 1487 edition is too early to present Francesco Berni's Tuscan standardization of Boiardo's Italian, which was adopted in most twentieth-century anthologies and textbooks to embrace fascist projects of linguistic homologation. The original *Innamorato* is a material proof of the diversity and literary prestige of non-standard variants of the Italian language that the regime actively suppressed.²⁹ And, while the poem was never finished, its last lines are about the historical dissolution of any hope for Italian unity. The final vision of the poem is one of pessimistic political dismay: namely, the fire brought to the peninsula by the invasion of foreign troops led by Charles VIII, a conflagration that Boiardo witnessed right before dying. Mussolini's Venetian edition conveniently lacks the last Cantos of the poem. Its beautiful (but late) black and gold binding presents the Italianized title of Berni's version, and there is no frontispiece. All the elements that could disgruntle Mussolini are hidden. De Marinis had nothing to fear from such a secretly cheeky gift.

But Mussolini's ignorance did not apply to Panzini, of course. In the very essay in which he listed the 'heroic' quotations that supposedly made

²⁸ *Orlando Innamorato* is a title established by a tradition influenced by Ariosto's *Furioso*. The original title, in Boiardo's vernacular Italian, was almost certainly *L'inamoramento de Orlando*.

²⁹ See G. Klein, *La politica linguistica del fascismo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1986.

the *Innamorato* a Mussolinian book, he extensively explored all the aspects of localism, pessimism, romance, and liberating individualism that I just mentioned. In fact, he praised Boiardo's Lombard language, and underlined the originality of his take on love and fantasy. It is also meaningful that, elsewhere in that essay, Panzini employed quotations in a much more thorough way, proving his points through the overwhelming evidence of lines and lines from the poem. Only four sentences, listed without any context, were meant to prove that Mussolini must have liked the *Innamorato*. However, just a couple of pages further in the essay, Panzini mobilized fourteen different passages of the poem to show that Boiardo's style was not as rough and unpolished as his critics affirmed. He contextualized each of these quotations – which occupy almost three pages in “Nuova Antologia” – in the larger plot of the poem, interweaving them in an intelligible arabesque of textual evidence.³⁰ The contrast with the underwhelming catalog of Boiardo's supposedly Mussolinian “sentenze eroiche” is striking.

In general, *La bella storia di Orlando* relies systematically on quotations – much more, in quantitative terms, than Panzini's previous work on Boiardo. In it, any informed reflection and elegantly written reconstruction is punctually followed by brief but numerous, well selected excerpts from the texts in exam, often in annotated series that go on for more than a page. Interestingly, while the essay discusses both Ariosto and Boiardo, the quotations from the *Innamorato* far exceed those from the *Furioso*, confirming that Panzini's aim was to make the former more familiar to readers and demonstrate its influence on (and, for certain aspects, superiority to) the latter. This effortless *citazionismo*, as I

³⁰ See A. Panzini, *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*, cit., pp. 27-30.

mentioned at the beginning of this essay, was Panzini's trademark. However, the sheer mass of the quotations, as well their organization in probative lists, was not typical of his prose.

Before he had to aggressively vindicate Boiardo against the hostility of his fellow fascist intellectuals (and force the *Innamorato* into the narrow heroism authorized by fascist virility), Panzini considered himself an anomalous classicist, uninterested in the small details of the great texts that he loved. While he always represented himself as a learned reader, he wanted his relationship with the tradition to appear spontaneous and anti-philological, even magic. Panzini's first important novel, *La lanterna di Diogene* (1907), opens with a self-portrait as a reader that offers a perfect synthesis of this. In it, Panzini expressed his ambition to be an anti-pedantic humanist, a scholar for whom books (and in particular epic poems) were like bicycles, inspiring the same aspiration to evasion, wonder, and freedom:

“V'erano poi certi libri che mi facevano un effetto diverso da quello che fanno agli altri studiosi. Così, per esempio, dall'*Orlando Furioso* veniva fuori una gran cavalcata; dalla «Gerusalemme» un pianto di belle donne amoroze; dall'*Odissea* un profumo di grande mare azzurro su cui si stende il canto di Circe, la maga. Dalla *Divina Commedia* veniva fuori l'alba che vince l'ora mattutina e un gridio di uccelletti su la divina foresta spessa e viva. Ma il più bello era che questi magici libri non mi dicevano mica: 'mettiti lì, a far dei commenti!', ma invece mi dicevano paternamente: 'va, cammina, svagati!'. Questi consigli corrispondevano appunto a quelli della mia vecchia bicicletta.”³¹

Along this paradigm, throughout his early production Panzini resorted to quotations in a playful, ironic way, caring more about the evocative power of great books than the evidentiary value that one could extract from their lines. Another emblematic depiction of his relationship with textuality is the 1920 novel *Il diavolo nella mia libreria*, which plays

³¹ Id., *La lanterna di Diogene*, Milano, Treves, 1907, p. 3.

on the old humanistic trope of haunted libraries.³² At the beginning of the story, the narrator inherits a collection of volumes that reveal themselves to be cursed. He cannot get rid of them and discovers that they behave in strange ways. The fantastic elements of the plot form an allegory of the vitality of books, which have their own agency and personality, like ghosts. They also ironically mock the author's own bewilderment in a progressively more ignorant, automatic, and speedy modernity.

In *Il diavolo nella mia libreria*, the age of quiet and attentive close reading an universally shared knowledge of the classics is both longed for and derided. Therefore, Panzini uses literary quotations like quirky jokes from a bygone time: surviving sparks of witty bookishness sent into the world, like coded messages, in search of kindred spirits able to appreciate them. For instance, to comment on how Catholicism allows for sin as long as the sinner repents, the narrator formulates the hendecasyllable “E tornava a peccar senza paura”, immediately explaining that “è il bel verso del Boiardo, dove parla di Astolfo, così leggiadro cavaliere, ma così debole in sella”, and then quoting the *Innamorato*: “Lui solea dir che gli era per sciagura, / e tornava a cader senza paura”.³³ Even an exquisite reader like Emilio Cecchi, privately commenting on literary allusions and quotations in this novel, had to admit that Panzini, while refining his prose, was turning his art into a cypher.³⁴

Now, one could object that, despite being loosely autobiographical and essayistic in tone, both *La lanterna di Diogene* and *Il diavolo nella mia*

³² On which see L. Bolzoni, *Una meravigliosa solitudine: L'arte di leggere nell'Europa moderna*, Torino, Einaudi, 2019, pp. 22-33 and 47-51.

³³ A. Panzini, *Il diavolo nella mia libreria*, Milano, Mondadori, 1921, p. 156. See M. M. Boiardo, *L'innamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 40 (I, i, 60, 7-8).

³⁴ See A. Baldini – E. Cecchi, *Carteggio 1911-1959*, a cura di M. C. Angelini e M. Bruscia, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003, p. 203 (letter to Baldini, December 19, 1920).

libreria are creative works, which by nature rarely rely on quotations as argumentative tools. However, as I mentioned, Panzini's coeval scholarly works on Boiardo used quotations parsimoniously and ironically as well.

Before considering Panzini's major contribution on the *Innamorato* before fascism – his 1918 book *Matteo Maria Boiardo* – I would like to conduct a brief incursion into one of the most curious projects that he worked on for most of his life. One of the ways in which Panzini performed his literary identity as an untimely intellectual, stuck in the past but ironically aware of the world's progress, was the edition of a popular dictionary aimed at collecting the words that most dictionaries do not include. This *Dizionario moderno*, reprinted and updated several times between 1905 and Panzini's death, defined two kinds of unfamiliar terms of the twentieth century: those that most modern people had forgotten, and those that were too new or too foreign to have been crystalized by linguistic authorities. In the dictionary, Panzini used Boiardo's authority, through quotations, to illustrate the meaning and use of many of such words. Predictably, most are archaic, literary, or regional terms related to chivalry: *ferrante* for horse, *tenitòrio* for kingdom, *viera* for spear, and so on. However, Panzini's encyclopedic knowledge of the *Innamorato* allowed him to play 'quotational jokes', so to speak, even as a lexicographer, with the same irony and freedom that he employed in his novels. For instance, to complete the definition of the loanword *express* (the Italianization of a French use of an English word for a train with no intermediate stops), he quoted Boiardo's last lines: "Un'altra volta, se mi fia concesso, / racconterovvi il tutto per espresso."³⁵

³⁵ See A. Panzini, *Dizionario moderno. Supplemento ai dizionari italiani*, Milano, Hoepli, 1913², pp. 204-205 (*Express*), p. 218 (*Ferrante*), p. 578 (*Tenitòrio*), p. 620 (*Vera*). See also *ibidem*, p. 22 (*Angèlica, l'anello di*): "Leggi il caro e bel poema

While the 1918 monograph *Matteo Maria Boiardo* was rather serious in its scholarly aspirations (Panzini hoped to use it as his main credential to become a professor),³⁶ the influence of the ‘bicycle’s suggestions’ were still strong in it. Its amicable tone and resigned irony are much closer to the spirit of Panzini’s early works than to the hyper-quoting litigiousness of the fascist years. The main thesis is the same of *La bella storia di Orlando*: Boiardo is the true father of chivalric literature and should be re-evaluated as such. To prove this thesis, quotations were certainly important. As a matter of fact, in the middle of the essay, Panzini specifies that the origin of Boiardo’s misfortunes was precisely the fact that he was never appropriately quoted by Ariosto – who, instead of citing his real model, only evoked the legendary authority of Turpin. Panzini’s attitude towards this injustice, however, is much milder than in the bitter writings of 1933, and a rejection of pedantry is at the core of his argument:

“Io del resto ammiro ed amo moltissimo l’Ariosto, lo amo per il suo spirito di indipendenza, lo ammiro per la sua saviezza, sia pure anche un po’ egoistica e scettica; e la sua buona natura è in si ricca dose da disprezzare i pedanti magniloquenti del tempo suo [...]. Certo mi spiace vederlo saccheggiare tanto il Boiardo, citare tanto Turpino, e mai già dissi il vero Turpino: il Boiardo.”³⁷

While quoting Boiardo is still the right thing to do in this 1918 essay, Panzini evidently practiced his *citazionismo* quite differently before fascism. Rather than accumulating evidence on a point, or sowing together

del Boiardo, *L’Orlando Innamorato*” (with no mention of Ariosto). See M. M. Boiardo, *L’Innamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. II, p. 1795 (III, ix, 26, 7-8).

³⁶ A friend, years after his death, reconstructed this intention, which eventually brought Panzini, for a single term as an adjunct, to the chair of Italian Literature in Bologna (the most prestigious position at the time, previously held by Carducci and Giovanni Pascoli). His lessons were, of course, about Boiardo. See M. Valgimigli, *Panzini e Boiardo*, in “Il Resto del Carlino”, 19 agosto 1954, p. 3.

³⁷ A. Panzini, *Matteo Maria Boiardo*, Messina, Principato, 1918, p. 73.

a patchwork of annotated sentences, he bet on uniquely representative passages, privileging quality over quantity. Most of the book paraphrases and retells Boiardo's story without excerpts from the text, but, when Panzini needs to summarize a crucial concept, he resorts to his beloved author's eloquence. For instance, to explain the authenticity of Boiardo's concept of chivalry, he chose a single emblematic octave, even if, as he admits, he could have collected dozens of relevant passages and excerpts:

“Io potrei riempire molte pagine con citazioni di passi boiardeschi che dimostrano come i suoi cavalieri sono cavalieri: cavalieri, e non borghesi o mercanti o plebei che portano le armi per mascheratura. Ma questo sistema di citazioni non mi piace troppo. Valga per tutte questa ottava molto esplicita: *Ciascun che puote e non divieta il male, in parte del difetto par che sia; ed ogni gentiluomo naturale viene obbligato per cavalleria d'esser nemico d'ogni disleale, e far vendetta d'ogni villania.*”³⁸

3. *Necromantic and Indirect Quotations*

The octave quoted in *Matteo Maria Boiardo* to explain what chivalry means in the *Innamorato* had already appeared in its entirety in *La Madonna di Mamà*, a melancholic and satirical *Bildungsroman* that Panzini published in 1916. In it, Panzini stigmatized the inherent perversion of bourgeois and aristocratic classes, showing how they corrupted the candid nobility of the rural, provincial youth that, in those years, was called to the front to fight in World War I. The novel revolves around Aquilino, an adolescent from the province who joins the household of a marquis as a tutor for his child but ends up seducing the marquis' wife, debating his identity, and finally enlisting in the army. In the marquis' studio – a tower called Albracca, like the mythical city in Cathay featured in the *Innamorato*

³⁸ Ivi, p. 38. See M. M. Boiardo, *L'inamoramento de Orlando*, cit., vol. I, p. 584 (I, xxi, 3, 1-6).

– a copy of Boiardo’s poem is always open on a bookrest on the desk. When the marquis suddenly dies, in the central scene of the novel, Aquilino begins to realize the immorality of his new life and reads the book, which is open on the octave about chivalry, evil, and disloyalty. Panzini transcribes the eight lines in the novel without any comment, but then he tells of how, after reading them, Aquilino was visited by the ghost of the marquis in his dreams. The ghost calmly accused him of having a filthy soul (“Il bene vale il male; se non che il male è sudicio; non ti pare di essere un po’ sudicio, Aquilino? La tua biancheria è profumata; ma la tua anima ha bisogno di un bagno”).³⁹

The presence of Boiardo crosses the entirety of *La Madonna di Mamà* (starting from the proudly anti-Tuscan northern morphology of the keyword in its title), but the necromantic power of the quoted octave is particularly striking. It is interesting that the novel was dedicated to Renato Serra, a writer and literary critic who had died in combat in 1915. Serra was a dear friend of Panzini, and wrote the first important essay about his literary work. At the end of *La bella storia di Orlando*, Panzini evoked the memory of Serra after explaining how the *Innamorato* was resuscitated by Antonio Panizzi, in London, in 1830, through the re-edition of the original Lombard text along with that of Ariosto’s *Furioso*. A vision of his dead friend concludes Panzini’s book on Ariosto and Boiardo: in it, Serra is a ghost, “con la fronte spezzata perché morì anche lui per la dolce patria, pari a Rolando”.⁴⁰ Coming back to visit Panzini from the afterworld, the dead critic compliments his friend for his loyalty to the *Innamorato*: “Bravo professore, mi fa piacere che lei sia di quei pochi che vogliono bene al

³⁹ A. Panzini, *La Madonna di Mamà*, Milano, Treves, 1916, p. 255.

⁴⁰ Id., *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*, cit., p. 39.

Boiardo”.⁴¹ What is interesting in this narrative and paranormal epilogue is that Serra’s ghost is animated by a quotation, like the ghost of the marquis in *La Madonna di Mamà*. According to Panzini’s tale, Serra’s ghost recited to him a few lines from a poem of his, an unpublished ode about Boiardo’s magic and Angelica’s smile. To boost the absurd realism of the tale, Panzini states that he did not know that Serra, during his life, had written poetry. He transcribed the lines as he heard them from his ghost:

“Co’ la nova dolcezza che il bel sole
di primavera per l’azzurro effonde,
a te ritorno, mago di gioconde
greche bellezze e d’incantate fole.
[...]
con l’alba la bocca incantatrice
par d’Angelica, e il riso.”⁴²

Both *La Madonna di Mamà* and *La bella storia di Orlando* were, in different ways, linked to Panzini’s grief for an intellectual friend. In both texts, ghostly apparitions are linked to the direct quotation of literary texts. The distance between the two necromantic quotations – one fictional and the other autobiographical, one generative and the other sepulchral, one Hamletic and the other elegiac – encapsulates the parable of Panzini’s rapport with Boiardo’s text before and after fascism. In early works, Panzini’s classicism looked forward, while later, especially in his essays on Boiardo, the necromantic power of his quotations was purely nostalgic, looking backwards. While he started as a creative *citazionista*, able to use his literary memory for cyphered messages, refined jokes, and emblematic summarizations, Panzini progressively turned into a more pedantic, and even fraudulent accumulator of quotational evidence.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

In any event, his most elegant and powerful re-uses of the *Orlando Innamorato* remained the indirect ones, the most purely literary, those in which his love for the source did not need to mention Boiardo's name – the same kind of implicit tributes that he reproached Ariosto for. The last novel that he published before dying, *Il bacio di Lesbia*, still offered, in 1937, examples of these oblique quotations from Boiardo. Lesbia's entrance for instance, disrupting a conversation between Catullus and Cicero, is traced over Angelica's appearance in Boiardo's first Canto:

“Intanto era arrivata la basterna della dama. una doppia pariglia di servi etiopi la portavano. La dama vi si adagiò, fu issata su.

Pareva Angelica la bianca, quando apparve al concistoro di re Carlo Magno fra quattro giganti grandissimi e fieri.

[...] Catullo non udì le parole di Cornelio Gallo. Egli era rapito in quella divinità femminile: si era perduto dietro quei quattro umani che si allontanavano con in alto quella bianchezza.”⁴³

In lines like these, Panzini's original plans to listen to his bicycle and to reject systems of quotations are still clearly echoing. Despite his attempts forcibly extract heroic virility from the *Innamorato* to explain a curious Mussolinian gift and prove apoint to his fellow fascist intellectuals, Panzini's literary memory naturally gravitated towards the individual nobility of chivalry and its alliance with the power of desire and love.

⁴³ Id., *Il bacio di lesbia*, Milano, Mondadori, 1937, pp. 67-68.

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