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(Quick)Silver Masters: Modern and Post-Modern Revivals of Quattrocento Chivalric Poems

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ABSTRACT

Modern revivals of the 'golden' age of Italian chivalric epic are widely studied. This essay addresses the less explored legacy of fifteenth-century chivalric poems, traditionally regarded as 'silver' models of the genre in terms of language, structural harmony and literary ambition. After profiling a more general Quattrocentismo in early twentieth-century art and literature, I consider two specific cases: Alberto Savinio's creative uses and intentional misuses of the *Morgante maggiore*, and Alfredo Panzini's neo-classical revivals of the *Orlando innamorato*. Savinio works on fifteenth-century epic as an archaeologist, Panzini as a restorer. By analyzing the importance of Pulci and Boiardo as ethic and aesthetic models for such apparently opposing intellectuals (a protagonist of international vanguardism and a fascist erudite author of popular novels), I move to define the Quattrocento masters as 'quicksilver' rather than 'silver' auctoritates. I conclude by showing their continuing influence beyond the end of modernism.

KEYWORDS

Morgante; *Orlando innamorato*; Alberto Savinio; Alfredo Panzini; modern revival

The great defects of Boiardo were his treating too seriously the narratives of chivalry, and his harsh style. Ariosto, in his continuation, by a judicious mixture of the gaiety of Pulci, has avoided the one; and Berni, in his reformation of Boiardo's poem, has corrected the other.

George Gordon Byron, 1822¹

The 'Quicksilver Age' of Italian Literature (And Its Legacy)

In the advertisement for his translation of the first canto of Luigi Pulci's chivalric masterpiece, Lord Byron summarised a long-lasting idea about Quattrocento literary fiction, which is often described as a battle of opposing excesses destined to be harmonised by the 'judicious' genius of Cinquecento masters. Compressed between two golden ages – with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio on one side and the full splendour of the Renaissance and Baroque eras on the other – Italy's fifteenth century, in terms of its literary languages and styles, has in fact been traditionally associated with silver: a minor if inventive phase; a sort of laboratory for the higher achievements of later periods. Such a prejudice, rooted in the embryonic literary and linguistic theory of the following century, has been challenged by

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¹George G. Byron, 'Morgante Maggiore', in *The Complete Works of Lord Byron*, 5 vols (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824), I, p. 261. The author wishes to thank the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts at Princeton University and the Department of Italian and Italian Studies at Bryn Mawr College for providing the resources and time to complete this work, which started at the Scuola Normale Superiore as a footnote in a dissertation about Ariosto. Thanks also to the anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful suggestions, and to Daniel T. Grimes for his linguistic assistance.

modern historians and critics.² However, labels such as ‘silver Italian’ or ‘the silver age of Italian literature’ still have currency in contemporary academic narratives about the Quattrocento.³ While resisting any positivistic impulse to rank centuries (as if the history of literature were an Olympic competition among generations of authors and their books), this essay intends to amend the symbolic epithet from the perspective of twentieth-century reception aesthetics and trans-historical influences, by paying special attention to the most ground-breaking genre of silver age letters – that with which Byron engaged directly: chivalric epics. More than minor or secondary echoes of previous and later golden *auctoritates*, fifteenth-century poems such as the *Orlando innamorato* and the *Morgante maggiore* have been perceived by late-modern authors as models of original lightness and creativity, of linguistic and narrative freedom: an alternative, more original or simply underrated gateway to the origins of Italy’s fantastical tradition. Therefore, the most appropriate metal to describe the Quattrocento from this point of view is not silver, but rather quicksilver: a temperamental, capricious substance capable of mirroring different modern styles, aesthetic imperatives and attempts to reform a nation’s literary inventions.

Today, the most explored topic in the field of Quattrocento epic revivals in late modernity is the study of puppet theatre, a centuries-old Southern tradition that made full use of Pulci’s and Boiardo’s stories.⁴ Two of the most prominent literary icons of Italy’s twentieth century, Gabriele D’Annunzio and Italo Calvino, were certainly readers of Pulci’s and Boiardo’s poems, and although Ariosto’s influence on their work is predominant in the scholarship, some attempts to reveal the importance of the Quattrocento precursors have been made. I will return, at the end of the essay, to the post-modern revivals of chivalric epic poems that Calvino championed and inspired. However, for the most part this study will focus on the first half of the twentieth century, a less explored period of cultural appropriations, re-conceptions of the Renaissance, and negotiations with the past as both a burden and a reason for pride. I believe that a reconstruction of the mercurial influence of the quicksilver age in Italian modernity must start from the age of the two World Wars and of fascism: the age in which movements such as Futurism and Rondismo, fascist neo-classicism and rational modernism polarised the debate on the past and on the models it offers to the post-Romantic imagination.

The two authors that I will consider, Alfredo Panzini and Alberto Savinio, were very different representatives of this period: a fascist intellectual and an anti-fascist polymath. They are the object of this article because, deeply concerned with the survival of the classics, they passionately used the *Morgante* and the *Orlando innamorato* to express their own theory of what literary reception is and how contemporary literature should make use of it. Their discovery of Quattrocento chivalric epics in the prime of Italy’s peculiar modernism offers a paradigm for later cases of reception and revival.

²I am thinking in particular of Bembo’s *Prose della volgar lingua* and the *trattatistica* on the epic genre by humanists such as Minturno, Pigna, Baruffaldi, and Tasso himself. See Stefano Jossa, *La fondazione di un genere* (Rome: Carocci, 2002), and Daniel Javitch, ‘Italian Epic Theory’, in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Glyn Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 205–15.

³The idea of ‘silver Italian’ was popularised by a seminal 1967 essay of language history: see Arrigo Castellani, ‘Italiano e fiorentino argenteo’, in *Saggi di linguistica e filologia italiana e romanza*, 3 vols (Rome: Salerno, 1980), I, pp. 17–35. For the Quattrocento as a Silver Age, see for instance a dated but popular American textbook such as Robert A. Hall, *A Short History of Italian Literature* (Ithaca: Linguistica, 1951), which encompasses the fifteenth century (including Ariosto’s early works, at the very end) in a chapter titled ‘The “Silver Age”’.

⁴See for instance the recent Jo Ann Cavallo, ‘The Ideological Battle of Roncevaux: The Critique of Political Power from Pulci’s *Morgante* to Sicilian Puppet Theatre Today’, in *Luigi Pulci in Renaissance Florence and Beyond*, ed. by James K. Coleman and Andrea Moudarres (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), pp. 209–32. See also Cavallo’s on-line archive *eBOIARDO: Epics of Boiardo and Other Italian Authors: A Resource Database On-line*, ed. by Jo Ann Cavallo, <<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/eboiardo/>> [accessed 9 November 2018].

Competing Forms of 'Quattrocentismo'

The literary culture of Italy's late modernity, so divided between reactionary and avant-garde impulses, is heavily indebted to sixteenth-century chivalric epics, their visual and textual legacies, and their legendary, mythologised authors. A lot has been written about the influence that the *Gerusalemme liberata* cast over late Romanticism and the age of revolutions, and it is known that the figure of Torquato Tasso himself (the deranged genius, the melancholic imprisoned maverick) inspired authors, painters, and intellectuals between the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁵ Ludovico Ariosto's model, so famously crucial for European Romanticism, affected the machine age in ways that are currently being investigated by a number of critics.⁶ Fascist culture directly engaged with the poet's legacy in 1933, when Italy celebrated an Ariostean centennial anniversary with significant international echoes – the initiatives in Ferrara in particular, which included a five-year-long cycle of popular conferences and a revival of the city's Palio, involved many protagonists of Italy's late modernity, from Futurists and para-Surrealists to traditionalists and Rondisti.⁷ In order to unearth the meaning of the revival of Pulci and Boiardo before World War II, one has to consider that context of more canonical, more visible homages and appropriations of the golden authors of chivalric literature.

Another important contextual factor is the diffused – albeit often overlooked – fascination for the Quattrocento in general that Italian modernism expressed in various ways, particularly in its reactions (at times enthusiastic, at times critical) to the developments of Dada and Surrealism in Europe.⁸ Ungaretti, for instance, on the eve of the publication of the first Surrealist manifesto, declared that the most ancient of Surrealists was Burchiello, while Ardengo Soffici was a keen reader of Leon Battista Alberti.⁹ At the beginning of the century, Pulci's poem inspired one of the earliest illustrative cycles drawn by Alberto Martini, a forerunner of Surrealist aesthetics; indeed, the influence of Quattrocento visual art in the twentieth century, from Leonardo to Donatello, could be the subject of an autonomous comprehensive study.¹⁰ Suffice it to mention that Massimo Bontempelli in 1927 proposed fifteenth-century painters as the real forefathers of his Novecentismo and that almost twenty years later Gianfranco Contini nominated Piero di Cosimo – along with Tuscan comedic poets and narrators of the same period – to evoke an Italianate genealogical background for modern narrative experiments that are, as he put it, surreal without Surrealism.¹¹ Of course the disquieting geometry of Quattrocento painters (from Piero and Paolo Uccello to the Ferrarese school) was a fundamental model for Metaphysical art as well, including its literary extensions in the writings of Filippo de Pisis, Bontempelli himself, and both the de Chirico brothers.

Alberto Savinio's predilection for Luigi Pulci's octaves is therefore part of a multifaceted Quattrocentismo that characterised early twentieth-century Italy. Both Savinio and de Chirico were readers of chivalric poems, and when they arrived in Ferrara in 1915 they started a privileged

⁵On Tasso as a Romantic symbol of free spirit and erotic martyrdom, see Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Westview Press, 1979).

⁶Besides the cited works by Giulio Ferroni and Stefano Jossa, the most recent book on the theme is Sonia Trovato, *A chi nel mar per tanta via m'ha scorto: La fortuna di Ariosto nell'Italia contemporanea* (Rome: Carocci, 2018). See also Alessandro Giammei, 'La fortuna di Ariosto nella cultura letteraria e visuale del primo Novecento italiano' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, 2015 <http://primo.sns.it/39PIS_VISTA:39PIS_PC:39pis_dspace10671/1511> [accessed 14 January 2019]. On Ariosto and Romanticism, see Christian Rivoletti, *Ariosto e l'ironia della finzione* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014).

⁷See *L'ottava d'oro*, ed. by Antonio Baldini (Milan: Mondadori, 1933).

⁸For a recent reconstruction of the fifteenth-century roots of the so-called 'Italian Surrealism', see Alessandro Giammei, 'Surrealismo Italiano', in *Il contributo italiano alla storia del pensiero: Letteratura*, ed. by Giulio Ferroni (Rome: Treccani, 2018), pp. 661–67 (pp. 661–62).

⁹See Stefano Borsi, 'Architettura e natura: Ardengo Soffici lettore dell'Alberti', *Albertiana*, 11/12 (2008–2009), 251–60. On Burchiello as 'il più antico dei surrealisti' cfr. Giuseppe Ungaretti, 'Art & Littérature: Un poète du 'Quattrocento', *L'Italie Nouvelle*, 1.7 (1923), 1–7 (p. 2). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are my own.

¹⁰See Alessandro Botta, *Illustrazioni incredibili: Alberto Martini e i racconti di Edgar Allan Poe* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017).

¹¹See Gianfranco Contini, *Italia Magica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), p. 1; and Massimo Bontempelli, *Opere scelte*, ed. by Luigi Baldacci (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), p. 765.

trans-historical dialogue with Ariosto in particular.¹² However, it is Pulci's *Morgante* that actually introduced Savinio (one of the most linguistically inventive writers of his generation) to odd and archaic terms, poetic and sophisticatedly obscene idioms, and masterful plays on words in Italian.

Savinio's Pulci

Thanks to archival research by Paola Italia we now have precise information about Savinio's training as an Italian writer.¹³ Italia reconstructed the author's studies at the Braidense library in Milan, between 1909 and 1910, finding the very edition of the *Morgante* that he used to compose a working manuscript now preserved in the Bonsanti archives of the Gabinetto Viessieux in Florence, and known as *Appunti dal Morgante Maggiore di L. Pulci*.¹⁴ Reading this document (a list of lexical annotations on the most interesting expressions in the poem) it is clear that Savinio elected Pulci as a language tutor of sorts for his new Italian literary Surrealism. Along with other *auctoritates* studied and annotated in the same years (from Pietro Aretino to Giacomo Leopardi), Pulci offered a way to connect with a literary past that granted a patent of both Tuscan authenticity and non-canonical freshness to Savinio's experimentalism; a way to preserve genealogical bonds to a quintessentially Italian literary tradition without being a traditionalist. Interestingly, this initial philological relationship with Pulci's poem soon evolved into a more creative, even blatantly fraudulent form of intellectual filiation: when he began publishing in Italian, Savinio started resorting to the *Morgante* in order to justify his linguistic inventions, pretending to be quoting Pulci while he was in fact coining new words. Such an ironic, mischievous homage to his chivalric linguistic forefather puzzled critics for some time.

In a recent essay about Savinio as reader of Pulci, Antonio Triente described the *Appunti dal Morgante Maggiore* and connected them to the author's creative work.¹⁵ Triente mentions all the lexical quotations that Savinio directly attributed to Pulci in his debut book *Hermaphrodito* and later works, noticing – in accord with previous comments by scholars such as Gerd Roos and Italia herself – that none of these rare and hilarious words ('postione' for 'bottom', 'pordana' for 'flatulence', 'santa Uccella' for the Virgin Mary, and 'pordici' for 'flatulence' again) actually appears in any of Pulci's works.¹⁶ In fact, they do not seem to exist at all – except for 'postione', which is used, as vocabularies show, as far back as the thirteenth-century vernacularisation of the *Thesaurus Pauperum*, and maybe 'santa Uccella', which I believe could be a playful feminisation of the expression used by Dante ('il santo uccello') to refer to the imperial eagle on top of the Scaligeri emblem in *Paradiso*, xvii. 72. Knowing that Savinio, throughout his literary career, developed a taste for invented etymologies, erudite *hapax*, and quasi-Italian in general, his nonchalant use of non-existent words is hardly surprising in itself. What really matters in these passages is that the modern author decided to use Pulci precisely as an *auctoritas* from the past (just as Petrarch would have done with Cicero) by mentioning his name along with each vulgar but comically erudite expression. This case of modernist *imitatio* or ironic *ipse dixit* is, I would argue, absolutely intentional and

¹²See Alessandro Giammei, 'Ariosto, the Great Metaphysician', *Modern Language Notes*, 132.1 (2017), 135–62.

¹³In particular, see Paola Italia, "'Leggevamo e studiavamo molto': Alberto e Giorgio de Chirico alla Braidense", in *Origine e sviluppi dell'arte metafisica: Milano e Firenze 1909–1911 e 1919–1922* (Milan: Scalpendi, 2011), pp. 11–23.

¹⁴*Appunti dal 'Morgante Maggiore' di L. Pulci* (1909), in the Fondo Savinio, section 'scritti di Alberto Savinio', II, box 9, file 3 (AS. II.9.3.), 9 handwritten sheets. For more information on the document, see Paola Italia, *Le carte di Alberto Savinio* (Florence: Polistampa, 1999). The *Morgante* used by Savinio is a re-print of Flangini's eighteenth-century edition with Sermolli's commentary: *Il Morgante Maggiore di Luigi Pulci*, ed. by Pietro Sermolli (Milan: Sonzogno, 1875).

¹⁵Antonio Triente, 'Savinio lettore di Pulci', in *L'italianistica oggi: Ricerca e didattica*, ed. by Beatrice Alfonzetti (Rome: Adi editore, 2017) <http://www.italianisti.it/Atti-di-Congresso?pg=cms&text=p&cms_codsec=14&cms_codcms=896> [accessed 1 December 2018].

¹⁶See especially Gerd Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio: Ricordi e documenti. Monaco Milano Firenze 1906–1911* (Milan: Bora, 1999), pp. 262–63.

cleverly faithful to the spirit of Quattrocento chivalric epics: Pulci himself, after all, used the fake but credible authority of Turpin to justify some of his hyperbolic anecdotes and unbelievable stories.

Special attention should be given to a false etymology attributed by Savinio to the commentaries of the *Morgante*. In ‘La partenza dell’argonauta’ – the five-part novella included in *Hermaphrodito* in which Pulci is also mentioned as the inventor of the word ‘pordana’ – the narrator describes his train travel companions on a journey to Apulia and turns their card games into chivalric battles. A sudden digression insists on the word ‘azzardo’ (gambling), which offers the excuse to mention Pulci: the word, ‘pescata fra i commenti al *Morgante Maggiore* di Luigi Pulci’, is said to come from a Syrian castle called ‘Hassart’ where crusaders used to play games.¹⁷ Triente considers this mention of Pulci as the only coherent one in *Hermaphrodito* because it is directly related to one of Savinio’s handwritten notes on the *Morgante*.¹⁸ The false etymology is in fact included in the commentary of the edition of the *Morgante* that Savinio borrowed in Milan, a passage that the author transcribed in his notebook and evidently remembered.¹⁹ Triente notices that there is no trace of such a passage in William of Tyre’s history of the kingdom of Jerusalem (the source cited in the commentary), but I believe that Pulci’s commentator actually retrieved it from the Italian version of Gilles Ménage’s etymological dictionary – which cites the more obscure and anonymous *Historia belli sacri*, not William’s famous work (sometimes referred to as *Historia belli sacri verissima* and mentioned by Ménage right after the quotation – and in the quotation itself, by the anonymous monk who authored the chronicle).²⁰ In any event, the accuracy of the intertextual genealogy would probably make Savinio laugh: his exhibited erudition is actually another joke, another game of Chinese whispers with the classics. He (mis)remembered the same etymology at least three times in his later writings, attributing it to the commentaries of Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*, another important literary source of inspiration that he had read and annotated in Italian. In his *Nuova Enciclopedia*, Savinio stated that he learned the origins of the word ‘azzardo’ as a boy, from a note in Cardinal Bentivoglio’s sixteenth-century edition of the *Argonautica*.²¹ In 1948, penning an article for Italy’s main newspaper, he mentioned the same edition and the same etymological oddity, while the following year, writing a book review in the Milanese daily *Corriere d’informazione*, he dated his reading of Apollonius to 1909 (and so to the moment in which he actually transcribed passages from the *Argonautica* and the *Morgante*) and mentioned an eighteenth-century translation.²² This last version of the *Argonautica* was probably the one edited in 1794 by Ludovico Flangini, the one that Savinio, as records show, actually borrowed at the Braidense.²³ Interestingly, Flangini is also the curator of the edition of Pulci quoted in *Hermaphrodito*, so the bouncing of the etymology between the two texts makes sense. But the meaning of Savinio’s misquotations goes beyond this coincidence.

¹⁷Alberto Savinio, ‘La partenza dell’argonauta,’ in *Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi*, ed. by Alessandro Tinterri (Milan: Adelphi, 1995), 107–83 (p. 121).

¹⁸Triente, p. 7.

¹⁹Specifically, a note on the expression ‘Zara a chi tocca’ (*Morg.*, xviii. 138. 6), on page 42 of the second volume of the Flangini-Sermolli edition.

²⁰*Belli Sacri*: [...] *convenirent ad munitissimum Siriae Castellum, captum à francis, cui nomen Hasarth; tantàque frequentia, ut Ludus Hazardi diceretur de more inter militias, Ludus aleatorius. Ita vidi semper conijcere ac sentire Eruditiores ad eam Tyrii observationem* [...] È derivazione poco verisimile; Guglielmo Tirio ne’ predetti luoghi, non solo non parlando di questa denominazione; ma né anche di questi giuochi’, *ibid.*. A comparison with the French edition (which has an almost identical entry) reveals that Ménage’s note is a poor translation of ‘William of Tyre, in those passages, does not mention either the word or the games’. About ‘azzardo’, Sermolli writes: ‘La qual voce vien forse da *azzardare*, sebbene alcuni, e Guglielmo Tirio infra gli altri, la facciano venire da *Hasarth*, nome di un castello in Siria; he then quotes the passage in Latin. See *Il Morgante Maggiore*, p. 47. For the source of Sermolli’s claim, see Gilles Ménage, *Le origini della lingua italiana compilate dal s.re Egidio Menagio, Gentiluomo Francese* (Geneva: Giovanni Antonio Chouët, 1685), p. 75.

²¹Alberto Savinio, *Nuova Enciclopedia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1977), p. 201.

²²The first article appeared in *Corriere della Sera* and was collected in Alberto Savinio, *Scritti dispersi (1943–1952)*, ed. by Alessandro Tinterri (Milan: Adelphi, 2004), pp. 728–31 and pp. 1235–38.

²³See Roos, p. 263; Italia, “Leggevamo e studiavamo”, p. 15.

Every single mention of the Pulci-Apollonius note is related to a reflection on the arbitrariness and playful elusiveness of literary and historical genealogies. The one in *La partenza dell'Argonauta* concludes with the sentence 'L'etimologia è una scienza buffa', while the 1948 one is introduced by the following consideration: 'Da quando io m'interesso alla storia e dirò meglio alle avventure delle parole ho veduto molte parole cambiare più volte di storia. Se una sola verità nelle altre cose manca, perché cercare una sola verità nelle parole?'.²⁴ In the 1949 article, speaking about his curiosity about the origins and secrets of things and words, Savinio states: 'Nell'etimologia io non cerco la verità. E come cercare la verità nell'etimologia? Da quando ho uso di vocabolario ho visto tali e tanti cambiamenti!'.²⁵ In *Nuova enciclopedia* the concept is even more clearly expressed, with a straightforward defence of conscious, intentional linguistic mistakes as vehicles of new knowledge.²⁶

Considering these erratic uses of Pulci (and/or Apollonius) as a source of knowledge, we can retrace Savinio's general theory of tradition: a playground for non-serious, childish artists who are curious about the roots of their literary and linguistic material but, at the same time, are also aware that there is no way to identify definitively and mirror those roots in the present. It is because of positions like this that Savinio, along with his brother Giorgio, has been called a precursor of postmodernism, or a 'proto-postmodern'.²⁷ Pulci, with his injudicious pastiche of measure and mixture, is the perfect guardian angel for such an anachronism in the interpretation of the de Chiricos' 'impossible classicism':²⁸ the author of the *Morgante* was definitely discontented with solemn epics and moral literature, and famously used meta-literary digressions to defend himself from the attacks of pedantic literati and Platonic academics.²⁹ But his defiant jest is not the only trait that bonds him to Metaphysical art.

In 1951, just a year before his death, Savinio was asked to participate in a book of essays titled *Il Quattrocento*; he sent, of course, a text on Luigi Pulci.³⁰ The homage to Pulci is subtle and ironic, and culminates with an idea that echoes what I have discussed so far: 'Io di Pulci penso meglio che dei suoi maggiori e di lui più gloriosi successori', declares Savinio while comparing him to Boiardo and Ariosto, 'perché è un cantastorie, e dunque: più vicino alle fonti'.³¹ In the essay, Savinio goes off on a number of apparent tangents in order to criticise the fifteenth-century Platonic Academia and Benedetto Croce's idealism, as if his own intellectual adversaries and Pulci's were iterations of the same historical constant. He notices that the *Morgante* prophesied Columbus' journey to America and paints a complex trans-historical fresco in which Pulci's Rinaldo and Namò are early modern versions of General Mac Arthur and President Truman (or vice-versa), Mao Zedong is the king of Saracens Marsilio, and the fight with the lion in *cantare IV* is compared with Henri Rousseau's 1897 masterpiece *The Sleeping Gypsy*. Savinio mirrors himself in Pulci: in Pulci's relationship with his own name, in his collaborative rapport with his artist brothers, in the negative reactions of critics ('anime schifiltose') to his food-related, low poetic metaphors.³² But the most interesting connection that he establishes between the *Morgante* and

²⁴Savinio, *Scritti dispersi*, p. 730.

²⁵Ibid., p. 1236.

²⁶'Chi assicura che ai fini della conoscenza "ultima", della conoscenza "suprema" l'errore è meno utile, meno fecondo, meno conoscente – meglio: chi assicura che la verità è sempre utile e l'errore sempre dannoso?' (Savinio, *Nuova enciclopedia*, p. 201).

²⁷Keala J. Jewell, *The Art of Enigma: The de Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 206.

²⁸Marisa Volpi, 'Classicità impossibile', in *Dei ed Eroi: Classicità e mito fra '800 e '900*, ed. by Maria Teresa Benedetti (Rome: De Luca, 1996), pp. 63–75.

²⁹On the disputes between Pulci and Neoplatonics (and with Marsilio Ficino, Matteo Franco, and Bartolomeo Scala in particular) and its literary consequences, see Alessio Decaria, *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani* (Florence: SEF, 2009), in particular pp. 209–35; and the recent: Federica Signorello, 'Pulci and Ficino: rethinking the *Morgante* (Cantos XXIV-XXV)', *Rivista di studi italiani*, 35.1 (2017), 80–138.

³⁰*Il Quattrocento*, ed. by Libera cattedra di storia della civiltà fiorentina (Florence: Sansoni, 1954). The pages of Savinio's essay on Pulci are pp. 93–144.

³¹Savinio, *Scritti dispersi*, p. 1557.

³²Savinio, *Scritti dispersi*, p. 1564.

Metaphysical imagination concerns a brilliant image used by Pulci to describe knights: ‘men for tailors’, meaning mannequins, the fundamental trope of de Chirico’s early paintings and Savinio’s early writings: ‘Straordinario verso “uomini da sarti”, ossia manichini: straordinaria anticipazione di quella metafisica espressione delle cose, che mio fratello e io avemmo proprio qui a Firenze, intorno al 1908.’³³

Panzini’s Boiardo

Alfredo Panzini’s relationship with the Quattrocento, and in particular with the *Orlando innamorato*, presents a more traditional case of explicit revival, one that exemplifies the wave of localist neo-classicism that pervaded Italy after the war and eventually blended in the nationalist passéism of fascist culture. Panzini’s poetics, torn between post-Romantic bourgeois themes and an idealised longing for pre-modern values, found a perfectly fitting model in Boiardo’s liminal position at the crossroads of fading Medieval codes and the nascent Renaissance culture. Born and raised in Boiardo’s Emilia Romagna, trained in literary studies there, at the University of Bologna, by Nobel laureate Giosuè Carducci, and popular, as a narrator, for his nostalgic tone and pastoral ideals, Panzini considered the count of Scandiano as the last real humanist in Italy’s literary history – a status that critic Luigi Russo then attributed to Panzini himself in a eulogy. ‘Egli è amico e parente’, said Russo, ‘di quel Matteo Maria Boiardo da lui così amorosamente studiato, vissuto anche l’altro in un’età che non credeva più a un vecchio mito, alla cavalleria’.³⁴

A true nobleman who was wrongfully overshadowed by his continuators, from Panzini’s perspective Boiardo was the perfect archetype for the so called *Ritorno all’ordine* that emerged in Italy (and in Europe) as a reaction to the explosion of vanguardism. After World War I, such a Return to Order involved many of the neo-quattrocentisti that I mentioned above – even Savinio himself, within the group that gave life to the journal *Valori Plastici*. Panzini was a peripheral but critically acclaimed and widely read protagonist of this current in Italy, along with his close friend Antonio Baldini who was a fervent lover and imitator of Ariosto, but who chose to adopt the nickname Margutte from the *Morgante* when he founded the flagship journal of the *Ritorno all’ordine*: *La Ronda*. Despite this favourable cultural context, Panzini’s predilection for the *Orlando innamorato* was an isolated if vociferous case even among Rondisti and Neo-Classicists in general, who instead promoted the revival of the *Furioso* between the 1920s and 1930s. Before recounting this competition between the two Orlandos, I will analyse the importance of the *Innamorato* in Panzini’s work.

For the story of Panzini and Boiardo, just as for that of Savinio and Pulci, the centre of gravity is a library. Not the Braidense in Milan, but the Ariostea in Ferrara: a prestigious institution directed and revamped, from 1892 to 1933, by literary historian Giuseppe Agnelli. Agnelli studied in Bologna with Panzini, he too under the guidance of Carducci. The great poet’s two pupils established an intellectual friendship, chronicled in their correspondence, which is held in the library’s archive.³⁵ Between 1913 and 1938, Panzini wrote a number of letters about Boiardo to Agnelli in Ferrara.³⁶ He asked for bibliographical suggestions regarding the poet’s historical context, sent his essays on the *Innamorato* for editing, and expressed his disappointment at the inadequacy of sixteenth- and twentieth-century readers of Boiardo, writing in one of the earliest letters that ‘Il Boiardo è un grande, che la pedanteria degli eruditi, la buffoneria del Berni, la incapacità degli italiani a comprendere l’epos, hanno condannato nell’ombra’.³⁷ Thanks to Agnelli’s erudite support and a number of research trips to the Ariostea library, Panzini almost

³³Savinio, *Scritti dispersi*, p. 1563.

³⁴Luigi Russo, ‘Alfredo Panzini, Ultimo umanista e poeta’, *Belfagor*, 4.3 (1949), 332–38 (p. 334).

³⁵See *Carteggio Panzini-Agnelli*, in the ‘Carteggio Agnelli’ archive of the Biblioteca Ariostea di Ferrara (busta 138).

³⁶See Giuseppe Muscardini, ‘Alfredo Panzini e il “Boiardo obliato”’. Dieci lettere inedite a Giuseppe Agnelli’, in *Italianistica*, 27.1 (1988), 57–65.

³⁷Muscardini, p. 60.

single-handedly reanimated Boiardo's legacy in the interwar period through three main divulgative endeavours: an anthology in 1924, a public lecture in 1931, and a narrative essay in 1933.³⁸ But even before these efforts, in the years of his first literary successes, the writer had already adopted Boiardo as a model and was already stigmatising his unfair condition of 'minore' in the history of Italian literature.

The earliest and most interesting pre-war publication to testify Panzini's love for Boiardo dates back to the beginning of 1913. This is probably the work that triggered his epistolary contact with Agnelli in Ferrara, which started a few months later, with a series of historical and bibliographical questions for a project on the *Innamorato* that would appear in 1918, to which I will return. This essay, titled 'Le sventure di un capolavoro', appeared in the flagship journal of Florence's Decadentism, *Il Marzocco*, and contains, in a nutshell, the essence of Panzini's literary and ethical theory. In it, Panzini praises the noble simplicity of Boiardo's heroes who, in spite of what critics expect and demand from the literature of the past, have nothing in common with the modern characters of popular authors like Bourget and D'Annunzio.³⁹ The old patina that covers Boiardo's stories and language, aggressively 'deturpata' rather than corrected by Berni's Tuscan revision, is actually its greatest virtue.

The author describes his reading of the *Innamorato* as an evasion from the iniquities and mediocrities of modernity: 'io vissi per parecchio tempo col nobile conte di Scandiano' he declares, 'vissi alla corte di re Carlo'.⁴⁰ Panzini's ideas about how the classics survive into modernity – the present has no memory, the past is lost forever, books are its last refuge – couldn't be more different from Savinio's. However, the stylistic feature that he appreciates most in the poem is the one that Savinio considered the strongest of Pulci's merits: 'schiettezza', a quality that could be understood to connote candour, smoothness, plainness, or even naturalness, originality.⁴¹ Literary masterpieces in general, in Panzini's experience, are vehicles to travel back in time to a better age rather than archetypes for current trends and events.

While Panzini insists on the immediate joy of reading Boiardo's octaves, he offers nonetheless a critical interpretation of the poem. He declares himself guided in his analysis by his 'love for divine beauty', in contrast with 'the so-called scientific method' and boring historicism in general.⁴² He sees the *Innamorato* as a faithful mirror of the idyllic society of the Quattrocento, the last truly noble time in Italian history. Such time, according to him, was disrupted by Charles VIII invading the peninsula: a traumatic event that almost coincided, chronologically, with Boiardo's death and with the definitive end of true chivalry. Panzini argues the *Innamorato* should not be considered unfinished, because history itself completed it; Boiardo was the last candid witness of the age of dames and knights: not a naive proto-Quixote, but a dignified idealist who couldn't survive his times:

[...] nessuno più del Boiardo fu buono, vero, e leal cavaliere. Non credette egli, certo, nell'elmo di Mambrino, nella fatata lancia d'oro d'Argalia, nell'anello magico di Angelica: ma credette nella legge eterna della buona cavalleria [...] visse realmente il suo sogno d'ideale, questa dispreziata idealità, senza cui irrespirabile è l'atmosfera della nostra vita.⁴³

Such a portrait of Boiardo is also a form of self-portrait: one in which personal values and literary fantasy, idealism and disenchantment, coincide.

As I mentioned, after publishing the 1913 essay in *Il Marzocco*, Panzini began to ask Agnelli for bibliographical recommendations. Irritated by the absence of Boiardo in an important series of

³⁸ *Le più belle pagine di Matteo Maria Boiardo*, ed. by Alfredo Panzini (Milan: Treves, 1924); Alfredo Panzini, *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso* (Milan: Mondadori, 1933). I will discuss both the books and the public lecture presently.

³⁹ 'Che vorrebbero i critici che i cari eroi ragionassero come un personaggio del Bourget o del D'Annunzio? Per fortuna sono più semplici!' (Muscardini, p. 60).

⁴⁰ Alfredo Panzini, 'Le sventure di un capolavoro', *Il Marzocco*, 18.6 (9 February 1913), 1–2 (p. 2).

⁴¹ 'Ci sono ragioni che fanno Pulci non dico superiore, ma più schietto dei suoi successori' (Savinio, *Scritti dispersi*, p. 1544).

⁴² Panzini, 'Le sventure di un capolavoro', p. 2.

⁴³ Panzini, 'Le sventure di un capolavoro', p. 2.

intellectual biographies of great authors, he decided to assemble an entire monograph about the Count of Scandiano: a popular and fresh little book that was preceded, in 1916, by the publication of a new essay in the most prestigious literary journal of the time, *Nuova Antologia*.⁴⁴ The declared purpose of the book, printed in 1918, was to cut out any critical intermediary between the *Innamorato* and its potential modern audience: this was, in effect, a defence and an endorsement of the book; an invitation, simply, to read it. There are three main qualities of the poem that Panzini intended to transmit to readers: the *Innamorato* is 'schietto nella parola', truly heroic with no excess of irony, and rich in melancholic humour.⁴⁵ The monograph was less successful than Panzini's two later books on Boiardo, but it contains most of his ideas on the *Innamorato* and on its possible impact on Italy's un-chivalric modernity.⁴⁶

After curating an anthology of the best pages from Boiardo's works for a famous literary collection in 1924, at the peak of his fame as an accademico d'Italia, Panzini was invited, in 1931, to speak at the 'Ottava d'oro', the cycle of lectures organised in Ferrara for the already mentioned centennial anniversary of Ariosto's death.⁴⁷ The 'Ottava d'oro' conferences, held from 1928 to 1933, functioned as a sort of long teaser for the Ariostean manifestations in fascist Ferrara, bringing eminent artists and fascist celebrities, writers and filmmakers, comedians and scholars to Ferrara to talk to a lay audience about the *Orlando furioso*. Only a few anti-fascist intellectuals, such as Benedetto Croce and Trilussa, declined the organising committee's invitation. Panzini, who positively embraced the popularising spirit of the fascist initiative but disapproved of the city's enthusiasm for the *Furioso* to the detriment of the *Innamorato*, decided to accept the invitation, but he hijacked the celebration of Ariosto with a trick: he chose the character of Angelica as his topic, and talked mostly about Boiardo, who originally invented her storyline, showing how the *Innamorato* is the truly original fountainhead for sixteenth-century Italian epics at large. While the public appreciated the lecture, the Ariostean committee in Ferrara (and in particular Panzini's friend Baldini, who had invited him in the first place) was evidently displeased with the excessive attention to Boiardo: Panzini's contribution is the only one that was not included in the edition of the collected papers from the conference – a rich, illustrated Mondadori volume that was solemnly offered to the King himself when he visited the city for the Ariostean celebrations. However, Panzini did not give up his battle for the recognition of Boiardo and, in the very year of Ariosto's centenary, decided to publish his lecture autonomously in *Lettura*, the literary insert of *Corriere della Sera*, which remains even today one of the most high profile publications in the country. A cheeky blurb introduced the long essay: 'Sarebbe ingiusto se, tra i sorridenti fantasmi evocati da questo anno ariostesco, non fosse ricordato il precursore Boiardo, il buon signore di Scandiano [...]. Panzini ripara, dottamente e amabilmente, l'ingiustizia'.⁴⁸ The lecture, in the version published in 1933, insists on the fact that Ariosto wouldn't have been able to write any part of his poem without Boiardo and that he didn't credit his master enough ('i figli divorano i padri').⁴⁹ Such a rhetorical strategy, in which Ariosto is characterised as a son rather than an adversary of Boiardo, became central for Panzini's subsequent Boiardesque effort: *La bella storia di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*.⁵⁰ The book, also published in 1933, was particularly appreciated by readers precisely because it exploited the general interest for Ariosto diffused by Ferrara's various initiatives. Its thesis is clear: not only were Ariosto's most noble and entertaining features present and even more enjoyable in Boiardo's poem, but even Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is much more a filiation of the *Innamorato* than it is an

⁴⁴Alfredo Panzini, 'Per il nobile poeta e signore Matteo Maria Boiardo', *Nuova Antologia*, 340.1 (1 April 1916). Panzini confesses the reason of his collaboration with the publisher Principato in a letter to Agnelli, see Muscardini, p. 61.

⁴⁵'Esso è schietto nella parola; è eroico e ricco di quella forma di tristezza che si chiama umorismo'. Alfredo Panzini, *Matteo Maria Boiardo* (Messina: Principato 1918), p. I.

⁴⁶*Le più belle pagine di Matteo Maria Boiardo*; Panzini, *La bella storia*.

⁴⁷On which see the chapter 'Ferrara folle, falotica e fascista' in Giammei, 'La fortuna', pp. 66–121.

⁴⁸Alfredo Panzini, 'Angelica regina del Catajo', *La Lettura*, 33, (May 1933), 497–515 (p. 497).

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁵⁰See footnote 38.

extreme consequence of the *Furioso*. In a polemical gesture of extreme traditionalism, Panzini interwove the masterpieces of later chivalric fiction by placing Boiardo as the ultimate end of the skein: as the real watershed between entertaining (but unliterary) medieval tales and exquisite (but derivative and overly cerebral) Renaissance and Baroque poems and novels.

After Modernity

Panzini's intention with respect to Boiardo's plots and language, in sum, was to correct an injustice, to re-establish historical truths against the current vulgate. Savinio, on the other hand, used Pulci to show that there is no truth in the realm of words, and that the present can rightfully alter the past just as much as the past influences the present. Savinio made Pulci his contemporary, while Panzini dreamed of being a contemporary of Boiardo. Both were fascinated with the literary language that preceded Bembo's strict reformation of written Italian; they thought that its 'schiettezza' could regenerate Italy's modern literature in an original way. But while Savinio's Quattrocentismo was a form of conscious archaeology, Panzini's looks more like a diligent work of restoration. Savinio shows that his century is much like Pulci's, whereas Panzini desires to return to Boiardo's age.

These two articulate cases of reception are idiosyncratic, but they are both nestled in a broader cultural context influenced by European modernism and fascist culture. After Savinio and Panzini, the story of the legacy of Pulci and Boiardo in the twentieth century merges into the neo-chivalric tendencies of Italy's postmodernity. As Pier Vittorio Tondelli recounts in his *Un weekend postmoderno*, the *Morgante* became the object of one of Andrea Pazienza's earliest comic book scripts in the 1970s, while in the 1990s the city of Scandiano commissioned a cycle of illustrations of the *Innamorato* to Academy award nominee artist Emanuele Luzzati, who produced forty drawings that are now permanently exhibited in the town's castle.⁵¹ Post-war revivals of chivalric literature were championed, in particular, by Italo Calvino, one of the most influential intellectuals of the century, whose popular trilogy, *I nostri antenati*, has been fruitfully linked not only to Ariosto and Tasso, but also to Pulci and Boiardo.⁵²

Drawing on the model of Calvino's popular re-writing of Ariosto's *Furioso*, Pulci's and Boiardo's poems were famously re-narrated in prose by a Gruppo 63 writer and intellectual, Giorgio Manganelli, and by a post-Surrealist narrator, Gianni Celati.⁵³ These popular but highly literary remakes were conceived towards the chronological margins of the most clearly postmodernist phase of Italy's literature. Analyses of both works, within the respective contexts of neo-avant-garde Italian experimentalism and the post-war 'lunatic' narrative of the Po valley, are available, and young scholars are currently working on them within the larger story of twentieth-century Quattrocentismo.⁵⁴ Both postmodern re-tellers are interested, just as Savinio and Panzini before them, in the linguistic freedom that 'silver Italian' offered to Pulci and Boiardo – the freedom that generated the *Morgante*'s grotesque hyperboles and metaphors as well as the *Innamorato*'s fantastic, indigenous clarity, at once aristocratic and popular. Savinio's model of revival is definitely the one that prevails in both Manganelli's and Celati's experiments: the

⁵¹Pier Vittorio Tondelli, *Un weekend postmoderno: Cronache dagli anni Ottanta* (Milan: Bompiani 1990), p. 57; Emanuele Luzzati, *Dell'amore, dell'avventura: l'Orlando innamorato* (Novara: Interlinea, 2005).

⁵²See for instance Anne Boule-Basuyau, 'Calvino et la littérature chevaleresque: Pulci, Boiardo, l'Arioste et les autres, dans "Il cavaliere inesistente"', *Collection de l'écrit*, 10 (2005), 269–93.

⁵³Conceived in 1972, Manganelli's text was only recently published: Giorgio Manganelli, *Un'allucinazione fiamminga: il Morgante maggiore raccontato da Manganelli*, ed. by Graziella Pulce (Rome: Socrates, 2006). A more recent attempt to re-write the *Morgante* was made in the collection 'I grandi classici riscritti': Paolo Nori, *Paolo Nori riscrive il 'Morgante' di Luigi Pulci* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2016). Gianni Celati, *L'Orlando innamorato raccontato in prosa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1994).

⁵⁴Besides Pulce's essay in the edition of Manganelli's *Morgante*, see for instance Marco Marangoni, 'Un classico postmoderno? Annotazioni sull'Orlando innamorato raccontato in prosa' di Gianni Celati', in *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 1 (2004), 173–99. Luca Zipoli is working on a PhD thesis on Luigi Pulci's revivals in the twentieth century, and presented a talk titled "'The classic as enigma': Manganelli's Re-Writing of Pulci's Morgante' at the 2018 International Conference of the American Association of Teachers of Italian in Cagliari.

marginality of the two poems in the canon is part of their charm, not an injustice to be corrected, and they are treated like amicable and present ancestors rather than remote models to be resuscitated. However, it is evident that Panzini's vocation to divulgation also left its mark in this kind of editorial operation and should also be compared with Alfredo Giuliani's re-telling of Tasso's *Liberata* and Calvino's *Furioso*.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵Alfredo Giuliani, *Gerusalemme liberata di Torquato Tasso raccontata da Alfredo Giuliani con una scelta del poema* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970); Italo Calvino, *Orlando furioso di Ludovico Ariosto raccontato da Italo Calvino con una scelta del poema* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970).