SHAKESPEARE'S DEBT TO BERNI

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The extent of Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian has long been a disputed question, but there is now compelling evidence that he read Ariosto in the original. Recent research shows that he used a passage of eight stanzas from the latter's romantic epic *Orlando Furioso* as a source for both *Love's Labour's Lost* (V.ii.638–659) and *Othello* (III.iv.62–75).[1]

Ariosto was not his only Italian source for *Othello*. He almost certainly read the source-story for that play, Cinthio's tale of the Moor in the *Hecatommithi*, in the original language.[2] In this article I shall show that he had at hand a third Italian work as he wrote *Othello* – Francesco Berni's *Orlando Innamorato* – and that he also made use of it when writing *Love's Labour's*, just as he did with Ariosto.

Berni's *Orlando Innamorato* (1541) is not a wholly original creation. It is essentially a re-working, or *rifacimento*, of Boiardo's epic of the same name. Boiardo's poem had the disadvantage of being written in the dialect of his native Ferrara, and was therefore less accessible to readers. In 1541 Berni published his version, rewritten in the better known Tuscan dialect, and in the process added many stanzas of his own. From this time onwards the *Orlando Innamorato*

1. R. Prior, "Shakespeare's debt to Ariosta", *N&Q*, ccxlvi (2001), 289–92. References are to the Arden editions of *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann (1996) and *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. H.R. Woudhuysen (1998). All italics are mine.
2. Arden *Othello*, 368–87.

was usually read either in Berni's *rifacimento* or in that of Lodovico Domenichi (1545).[3]

In the passage from which Shakespeare borrows – canto 51, stanzas 1–16 – the first five stanzas and the preceding "Argomento" are Berni's invention. The remaining eleven are his version of Boiardo's original, comprising stanzas 3–13 of Book II, canto 22. Berni omitted the first two stanzas of Boiardo's canto, but there is evidence that Shakespeare borrowed from them as well. It seems clear that both Boiardo's original and Berni's re-working were available to him.[4]

The most obvious example of Berni's influence on *Othello* is the close parallel between his first stanza and lines 159–164 of *Othello* III.iii. The similarity was noticed as long ago as 1823 by William Stewart Rose in his supposed "translation" of Berni.[5] It was later pointed out by George Brandes, who quoted the first six lines of the canto in his *William Shakespeare*.[6] But neither author explored the parallels in detail, nor did they realise that Shakespeare's borrowing extends for at least another fifteen stanzas.

Berni's theme in the first five stanzas of canto 51 is the theft of reputation, and in particular of a soldier's reputation. This theme is so important in *Othello* that it may have been what drew Shakespeare's attention to the Berni passage in the first place, and it is worth quoting the first stanza in full.[7]

3. See H.H. Blanchard, "Spenser and Boiardo", *PMLA*, 40 (1925), 828–51.

4. To give two brief examples among many, the conqueror "Alessandro" is mentioned in Boiardo's stanza 1. Compare "Alisander" in *LLL*, with six occurrences in the scene of the Worthies (v.ii) compared to three of "Alexander". At *LLL* III.i.180 we find Shakespeare's sole use of the word "imperator". It also occurs in Boiardo's stanza 2. Since Shakespeare is already borrowing from Boiardo, *via* Berni's version, these parallels are not likely to be coincidental.

5. *The Orlando Innamorato. Translated into prose from the Italian of F. Berni* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1823), xxix. This "translation" is in fact an abridgement. So far as I know, there is no English translation of Berni's *Innamorato*. There is a 16th century French translation of Boiardo (Paris, 1549) by J.V. Du Crest Arnaud, recorded in *Catalogue Général de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1903), 14: 1143. Robert Tofte published a translation of the first three cantos in 1598.

6. (London, 1914), 444–45.

7. Quotations from Berni's *Innamorato* are from *Raccolta dei più celebri Poemi Eroi-comici Italiani*, 3 vols (Firenze, 1841–42), I, 651–52; italics mine.

Chi ruba un *corno*, un cavallo, un anello
E simil *cose*, ha qualche *discrezione*,
E potrebbe *chiamarsi* ladroncello;
Ma quel che ruba la riputazione,
E dell'atrui fatiche si *fa* bello,
Si può *chiamare* assassino e *ladrone*,
E di tanto *più* odio e *pena* è *degno*,
Quanto più del dover trapassa il segno.

("Who steals a horn, horse, a ring, or something similar, he has some discretion, and can be called a petty thief. But he who steals a reputation, and makes himself look good with the labours of another, he can be called both a real thief and an assassin; and the more he crosses that line, the more worthy he is of hatred and punishment").

Lines 1–4 of stanza 1 are closely paralleled by Iago's words to Othello in III.iii.

Iago. *Who steals* my purse steals trash – 'tis *something*-
nothing.
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands –
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me *poor* indeed.
(III.iii.159–164)

Iago's first two lines reproduce the sense of Berni's first three. *"Who steals"* translates *"Chi ruba"*, both phrases stand at the beginning of a line and start the same train of thought. *"Something"* echoes *"cose"* and *"qualche cosa"* (st. 2, line 1). Iago's third line ("But he that filches from me my good name") is an accurate translation of Berni's fourth: *"Ma quel che ruba la riputazione"*. The first word of Iago's next line, *"Robs"* echoes the first word of stanza 2, *"Rubare"*. Iago's "poor" (164) may reflect "carestia" ("death"), also in stanza 2, line 3.

After line 164 Shakespeare ceases to echo Berni's actual words so exactly, but he continues to follow his train of thought. In stanza 3 Berni introduces the concepts of *thought* ("pensi") *secrecy* ("segreto") *revealing* ("rivelar") and the *deity* ("Dio"). Shakespeare now brings in the same ideas:

Othello. By *heaven*, I'll know thy *thoughts!*
Iago You cannot, if my heart were in your hand,
Nor shall not whilst 'tis in my custody.
(III.iii.164–66)

The next three lines contain *"beware"* ("Guardati", st. 7), *"mock"* ("gran riso" and "scorno", st. 4) and *"cuckold"* ("corno", st. 1 and 5).

Shakespeare had already exploited Berni's stanzas on the loss of reputation in an earlier scene, II,iii, in which Cassio laments his drunkenness and his consequent dismissal by Othello. Shakespeare borrowed much more here than he did in III.iii. In a passage of some 50 lines he first echoes Berni's point in stanza 1 that the loss of reputation is a kind of death ("assassino"):

Iago. What, are you *hurt*, lieutenant?
Cassio. Ay, *past all surgery.*
(II.iii.255–56)

Berni uses the word *danno* ("loss; damage; hurt") twice in stanza 2, as here:

Ma quel *danno* più preme e *più si sente.*
E dà *dispetto* e *dispiacer* maggiore,

("But that loss [of reputation] touches you more and is felt more, and causes greater vexation and grief").

Cassio's next speech echoes Berni's emphasis on *danno* and *riputazione*, and his later use of *bestia* ("beast", st. 9).

Cassio. Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have *lost* my *reputation*, I have *lost* the immortal part of myself – and what *remains* is *bestial.*
(II.iii.258–60).

"What *remains* is *bestial*" may also have been suggested by Berni's stanza 4, which tells the story of the bird who wore the peacock's feathers and the ass who put on the lion's skin. In the end both beasts *"remained* naked".

For Iago's reply Shakespeare looked back to *"pensi"* (st. 3) and *"più si sente"* (st. 2): "I *thought* you had received some bodily wound; there is *more of sense* in that than in *reputation*" (262–64). Here Iago,

who is himself a thief of reputation, says the opposite of Berni and of his own words to Othello in III.iii.

As he continued Iago's speech, Shakespeare took from Berni the themes of *deserving* ("degno", st. 1 and 5), *recovering* ("si riacquisti", st. 2) and a *way* or *means* ("via", st. 2).

> *Iago.* . . . *Reputation* is . . . *lost* without *deserving*. You have no *reputation* . . . There are *ways* to *recover* the *general* again.
>
> (III.iii.264–68)

In stanza 7 "imperadore" (imperator) means "Emperor", referring to Charlemagne, but it can also mean "a general, or commander", and it has this meaning in Boiardo's stanza 2.

Shakespeare now turned his attention to Berni's stanzas 4 to 7, where he found *lion* ("lione", st. 4), *malice* ("malizia" st. 5), *punishment* ("pena", st. 6) and *emperor* ("imperadore", st. 7). He included these words, or their derivatives, in the last four lines of Iago's speech: "a *punishment* more in policy than in *malice* . . . an *imperious lion*" (269–71). Note that Boiardo's alternative for "imperadore" – "imperiero" (st. 4) – is closer to Shakespeare's "imperious", and he may well have had it in mind.

Cassio's reply includes *"despised"* ("dispetto", st. 2); *"indiscreet"* ("discrezione", st. 1); *"speak* parrot" (st. 4, "parlar" followed by "pavone" – "peacock"); *"call"* ("chiamarsi"; st. 1); *"devil"* ("Il diavol", st. 6).

In stanza 5 Berni writes "per *quello/Ch'aveva fatto* con tanta *malizia/* Della *spada* ("for what he had done with so much malice with the sword"). Shakespeare has the same conjunction of *sword* and *he had done:*

> *Iago* . . . followed *with your sword? What had he done* to you?
>
> (II.iii.280–81)

In Cassio's next speech the following words have parallels in Berni: *things, God, steal, pleasance,* and *beasts.* Stanza 2 contains within four lines the words *"riacquisti"* (recovered), *"dispiacer"* (displeasure) and *"dispetto"* ("despight, also despised"[8]). Two lines

8. Quoted from John Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words* (1611), "dispetto".

later we find "nè l'*un* nè l'*altro*" ("neither one nor the other"). Shakespeare also places these words close together.

> *Iago.* . . . how came you thus *recovered*?
> *Cassio.* It hath *pleased the devil* drunkenness to give place to *the devil* wrath; *one* unperfectness shows me *another*, to *make* me frankly *despise* myself.
>
> (II.iii.289–293)

Finally, at lines 301–02, Iago's *"a beast! O strange!"* exactly reproduces the order of *"un[a] . . . bestia strana"* (st. 9).

Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of reputation was thus deeply indebted to Berni. But he had begun borrowing from the *Innamorato* long before II.iii, since he used it extensively in the first scene of the play. In the middle of stanza 6 Berni ends his digression on the theft of reputation and returns to Boiardo's narrative, which now begins the review of the pagan hordes who have gathered to invade France under the leadership of Agramante. Following Boiardo, he describes each pagan tribe in order, and names their leaders. Of particular interest to Shakespeare was the first king on the list, Drudinasso, since he and his people are North Africans from Libya, or Barbary ("di Libicana", st. 8), and are "black . . . from head to foot" ("Nera . . . dal capo alle piante"). The second tribe is also black, and has *"I labbri grossi"*, a description which Roderigo applies directly to Othello: "What a full fortune does *the thick lips* owe" (I.i.65).

For the next twenty lines Shakespeare borrowed little, although *"house"* and *"within"* both occur in Berni ("casa", st. 10; "dentro", st. 6). But between lines 85 and 116 he made full use of his source, beginning with Iago's first lying outcry to Brabantio: "Zounds, sir, you're *robbed*, for *shame put on* your gown! / Your *heart . . . lost* / . . . an old *black* ram" (85–7). *"Shame"* ("vergogna") and *"put on"* ("si vesti") both occur in stanza 4 to describe the ridiculous ass and jay, appropriate animals for Brabantio. For the next ten lines Shakespeare used Berni intermittently, but in stanza 5 he noticed the word *"malizia"* applied to the stealer of reputation, and in line 99 he applied it overtly to Roderigo, but implicitly to his own thief of reputation, Iago: "Upon *malicious bravery* dost thou *come* . . ." (99). *"Venuto è"* ("is come") are the first words of stanza 8. *"Bravery"*,

the reading of Q, may echo *"si vanta"* ("boasts", st. 6), or it may recall the stolen disguises of the ass and the jay. But the source also supports the Folio reading, "knaverie", since Berni's thief is a "knave" ("malandrino", st. 6; cf. "ruffians" and "villain" in lines 109 and 116).

For seventeen lines Shakespeare continued to use Berni freely. The "Argomento" of canto 51 provided *"fanno"* and *"amare"* (1. 103, *"make* this *bitter"*), and from stanza 10 he took *sure* ("certo"), *tell* ("dir"), and *house nor country house* ("casa nè villa").

> *Brabantio.* What *tell'st* thou me of *robbing?* This is Venice:
> My *house* is *not a grange.*
>
> (I.i.104–5)

Stanza 9 provided *"pure"* (suggested by the Italian "pure" = "as well"), and *"come"*) "viengli"): "In simple and *pure* soul I *come* to you" (106).

In stanzas 8 and 9 Berni portrays the black soldiers from Barbary, other black men with thick lips and the third pagan commander who is *"a strange beast"* ("bestia strana"). He also describes the horses which the two black commanders ride. Each is astride an "alfana", a large shire horse, and Drudinasso's mount is "a heavy shire horse in bad array" ("una grossa e sconcia alfana", st. 8). This description may have had obvious sexual overtones for Shakespeare. Not only could *grosso* mean *"obscene"* as *gross* often does in his work, but *sconcio* commonly means "indecent, licentious, immoral", and is regularly applied to prostitutes.[9]

Through a natural association of ideas, therefore, Shakespeare has Iago describe Othello, also a black general, as a *"Barbary horse"* who *"covers"* Desdemona. *"Covered"* in a non-sexual sense occurs in stanzas 6 and 16 ("coperta"), and "uncovered" ("scoperto") in stanza 10. Berni's influence on the following lines is extensive:

> *Iago.* . . . serve *God,* if *the devil* bid you. Because we *come*
> to do you service, and you *think* we are *ruffians,* you'll have
> your daughter *covered* with a *Barbary horse;*
>
> (II.i.108–110)

9. *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (henceforth *GDLI*), ed. Salvatore Battaglia (Torino: UTET, 1961–); "grosso", 36; "sconcio", 3.

As he continued with Iago's obscene invention, Shakespeare's mind turned to the military leader who is a *"beast"* ("bestia", closely following "labbri grossi" and "alfana", st. 9), and possibly to the other two beasts, the ass and the bird, who are "both naked" ("ambedue nudi", st. 4). He may also have noticed *"back"* ("dosso") in the same line as *"covered"* ("coperta", st. 16). He had also almost certainly read Boiardo's stanza 4 where we find the word "adosso". Iago, then, is one "that *comes* to *tell* you, your daughter and the Moor are now making the *beast with two backs"* (114–15).

After Cinthio, the Berni stanzas are by a long way the most influential source for *Othello*. The importance that Shakespeare placed on them may be seen in the fact that he turned to them when he began to write Othello's first speech of the play (I.ii.17–28). These twelve lines, and no others nearby, contain eleven words which have parallels with Berni: *spite* ("dispetto", st. 2), *signory* ("signoreggia", st. 9: "signor", st. 10), *know, boasting, honour* ("onore", st. 2), *life, royal* ("re", several examples, including st. 6 and 7), *speak, unhoused* ("Non ha ... casa", st. 10), *seas* ("mare", st. 6), *look* (imperative: "Guardati", st. 7).

In I.i Shakespeare associates the black general Othello with the two black leaders of pagan nations, Drudinasso and Sorridan. From I.ii.53 onwards he maintains this identification, since he now shows Othello as the leader of a "troop" of his own armed supporters (82, "you of my inclining"), just like the pagan leaders. He is met by Brabantio, backed by a similar armed troop of *"my people"* (I.i.139; cf. "la gente sua", st. 8). From this point until the end of the scene Shakespeare made continuous use of Berni's vocabulary, including the *"pagans"* (99) who were of such interest to him ("Pagani", Argomento). Between lines 57 and 64 the words *thief, come, swords, weapons, damned, things* and *sense* all have their counterparts in Berni: *cose, ladrone* (st. 1); *cosa, danno, si sente* (st. 2); *spada* (st. 5); *Venuto, arme* (st. 8).

Brabantio's speech at this point (62–81) expresses his disgust at the idea of Othello as a son-in-law. To convey this, Shakespeare turned again to the description of the black pagan leaders in stanzas 8–9. *"Sooty* bosom" and *"gross"* were both suggested by stanza 8, of which lines 3–5 read:

Arme non ha la *gente* sua *villana*,
Nera e *ricciuta* dal *capo* alle *piante:*
Cavalca egli una *grossa* e sconcia *alfana*,

("His uncouth people do not have weapons; they are black and curly from head to foot. He [Drudinasso] rides a large dishevelled shire horse").

Brabantio . . .
The *wealthy, curled darlings* of our *nation*,
Would ever have, *t'incur a general mock*,
Run from her *guardage* to the *sooty* bosom
Of such a *thing* as thou? To fear, not to delight.
Judge me *the world* if "tis not *gross* in *sense.*
II.ii.68–72)

"T'incur a general mock" is paralleled by *"gran riso fassi"* in stanza 4 ("much laughter is caused"). "Guardage" echoes *"Guardati"* ("watch, guard": st. 7). *"Nation"*, *"sooty"*, *"gross"* and *"sense"* parallel *"gente"*, *"nera"*, *"grossa"* (st. 8) and *"si sente"*(st. 2).

Within this stanza Shakespeare also found material to describe Desdemona's more conventional suitors – the "wealthy, curled darlings". *"Curled"* is a literal translation of *"ricciuta"*, and *"wealthy"* echoes *"ricco"* ("rich") which *"ricciuta"* contains. *"Darlings"* is a plural translation of a word in the last line of stanza 8 – *"fanciulletto"* (literally, "little boy"). *Fanciulletto* resembles *darling*, since it is a diminutive, and can be a term of endearment. *Fanciullo* can also mean "a young man", as "darling" does in its *Othello* context.[10]

Berni's poem furnished Shakespeare with another element which was central to this scene and to the play as a whole. This was the association between Othello and witchcraft which Shakespeare would also take from Ariosto. In stanza 9 the black and thick-lipped leader Sorridan is said to be "like the Befana" ("par la Befania"). "La Befana" is the ugly old witch who brings presents to Italian children, and Brabantio accuses Othello of witchcraft (as well as ugliness) throughout the speech: "thou hast enchanted her" (63); "practised on her with foul charms" (73), and so on. Sorridan is also said to be "out of the world" ("fuor del mondo"), and Shakespeare applies this anti-social

10. *GDLI*, "fanciullo", 8.

slur to Othello, whom Brabantio calls "an abuser *of the world*, a practiser/Of arts inhibited, and *out of* warrant" (78–9).

Shakespeare ended his borrowing in this scene by turning to the "Argomento", a verse stanza at the head of the canto. He may have been drawn to it by the presence of the word *"Pagani"*. Berni includes a word beginning with "p" in each of the eight lines of this stanza, and Shakespeare now follows this alliterative game by reproducing five of the "p" words between lines 83 and 99: *"pugnano"* ("fight", 1. 83), *"prigion"* and *"prigioni"*, ("prison", 1. 85), *"passare"* ("passage", 1. 98), *"Pagani"* ("pagans", 1. 99). In Joycean spirit he adds two of his own to this passage ("prompter" and "present"), and a few lines earlier "probable", "palpable", "practiser" and "peril" (76–81). Since Berni's stanzas are also a source for *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is interesting that Shakespeare similarly "affected the letter" in the first line of Holofernes' rhyme in that play: "The preyful Princess pierced and pricked . . ." (IV.ii.56).

In the next scene Othello makes his peace with Brabantio. In his despair at losing Desdemona, Roderigo offers to drown himself: "It is *silliness to live* when *to live* is torment" (I.iii.309). Roderigo's faint-heartedness reflects the character of the pagan nation described in stanzas 10–11, "who are all without daring and without heart" ("Chè senza ardir son tutti e senza core", st. 10). Like Roderigo, they are *"silly"* ("cosa stolta", st. 11), and lack the will to live: "It is as if they are made on purpose for the sword, because their life is so quickly taken away."

> È par che a *posta* sien fatti pel brando,
> Perchè *la vita* sia lor tosto *tolta*,
> (stanza 11.5–6)

Iago dissuades Roderigo from suicide with a long tirade in which he constantly returns to the concepts of *drowning*, *money* and *putting in a purse*: *"Drown thyself? . . . Put money in thy purse"* (336–340). *Drown*, with its variants, occurs nine times; *money*, eleven times; *put in thy purse*, six times. Shakespeare found all three concepts in Berni: *money* ("denar") is in stanza 12, *drowning* ("sommersa") in stanza 14, and *put in a purse* ("metterlo a bottino") in stanza 6. The principal meaning of *bottino* is "booty", and in stanza 6 "metterlo a bottino" has its usual sense of "put him [Charlemagne] to the sack", which Shakespeare would surely have known. But *bottino*

can also mean "a soldier's bag or pouch", so that "metterlo a bottino" might easily suggest "to put in a purse".[11]

In stanza 13 Shakespeare found the idea of *feeding on locusts* ("vivon di locuste"), and he added this to Iago's speech: "The *food* that to him now is as luscious as *locusts*" (348–49). All recent editors explain "locusts" as referring to the fruit of the carob tree. But since Shakespeare is here following Berni, and elsewhere frequently likens Othello to the pagan tribes, it is more likely that he meant Iago's words to be taken in their more obvious sense. Othello enjoys eating insects. To quote Berni in full, this tribe "feeds on grass, and I do not know if they enjoy anything else. Turpin writes that they live on locusts".

> Si *pasce* d'*erba*, e non so ch'altro *guste;*
> Scrive Turpin che *vivon* di *locuste.*
> (stanza 13.7–8)

Both the assonance and meaning of *guste/locuste* are echoed in Iago's *luscious / locusts*. *"Guste"* may also have suggested *"enjoy"* in "all the tribe of hell, thou shalt *enjoy* her" (358). The description of the people of Fersa in stanza 14 may have given rise to "the *tribe of hell*", since this people "curse themselves, and the heaven, and their own creator". This line may also lie behind "thou wilt needs *damn myself*" (353–54) in the same speech.

As well as the desire for death, drowning and money, Shakespeare took from these later stanzas yet another concept which was important to this scene between Iago and Roderigo – the theme that each is tied to the other. Iago claims that he is *"Knit* to thy deserving with *cables"* (338).

> *Roderigo.* Wilt thou be *fast* to my hopes, if I *depend* on the issue?
> *Iago.* Thou art *sure* of me – *go . . . Let us be conjunctive . . .*
> (I.iii.363–68)

Shakespeare came across this theme in the last two lines of stanza 14, the stanza which had already given him *drowning*: "But *let her* [France] *be allied with us*; and every Christian will have a hundred of them [the pagans] on his rope".

11. *GDLI*, "bottino".

Ma *lascia* che *co'nostri* ella si *stringa*,
Ogni cristian n'arà cento per *stringa*.
(stanza 14. 7–8)

The key verb here is *stringere*, which can mean "to make an alliance", but more commonly means "to tie, or knot", hence *"knit to"*. It can also mean "to join", like *congiungere*, which led Shakespeare to *"conjunctive"*.[12] As the Arden editor points out in his note on lines 363–64, "both *fast* and depend. . . imply tying".[13] So does *"hanged"* (360).

Iago's *"sure* of me – *go"* reflects stanza 13, where *"va"* ("go") and *"sicuro"* ("safe, sure") are also together. *"Wars"* (341), *"out of the way"* (360) and *"told"* (366) are paralleled by *"guerra"*, *"lontano"* (both st. 13) and *"detto"* (st. 11).

There is ample evidence that Shakespeare also consulted Berni for the next scene between Iago and Roderigo (II.i.212–310). Most of his borrowings are found, as before, in Iago's long speeches. The following words, taken in order from two speeches totalling thirty-four lines (212–246), all have counterparts in Berni: *harbour* ("porto", Argomento), *come*, *valiant* ("valore", st. 7), *watches* ("osservi", st. 3), *guard*, *tell*, *bragging*, *discreet*, *heart* ("core", st. 10), *eye* ("occhi", st. 3), *fed* ("si pasce", st. 13), *devil*, *loveliness*, *"beauties: all"* ("bellezza . . . Ognun", st. 7), *want* ("carestia", st. 2) *find* ("trovato", st. 7), *"disrelish . . . second choice"* ("altro guste", st. 13), *knave* ("malandrino", st. 6), *putting on* ("si vesti", st. 4), *"counterfeit . . . true . . . devilish"* ("contra 'l vero. / Il diavol", st. 5–6), *finder*, *folly* ("stolta", st. 11), *found*.

In some of these examples we see Shakespeare echoing Berni's verbal juxtapositions. Another example of this habit is *"bragging* and *telling"* (221), which simply reverses *"diciam"* and *"si vanta"* in line 5 of stanza 6.

Shakespeare continued to borrow intermittently from Berni until 273, where *"mutiny"* is close to "the *displanting* of Cassio". Berni has the line "Di *disfar* Carlo e metterlo a *bottino*" (st. 6), in which *disfare* means "to destroy, dismantle". *"Plants"* ("piante")

12. *GDLI*, "stringere", 2.
13. Arden *Othello*, 158.

occurs two lines later. *"Bottino"* has the alternative meaning of *"mutiny"* in Florio's dictionary.[14]

We have already seen how Shakespeare used the *Innamorato* in II.iii and III.iii. In the following scene, III.iv.30–80, Othello tells Desdemona the history of the embroidered handkerchief, and warns her not to lose it. We now know that several key elements of this scene were derived from Arisoto's *Orlando Furioso*, canto 46, stanzas 78–85, which tell the story of the magic tent that the seer Cassandra embroidered for Hector. Since Cassandra did not fit into Othello's history, Shakespeare replaced her with another female prophet, a Sibyl, whom he found in Berni's stanza 10. "S'io fussi dotto come la *Sibilla / In profezia*" ("If I was as learned in prophecy as the Sibyl"). The Sibyl's skill in *"profezia"* agreed neatly with the *"furor profetico"* of Cassandra in Ariosto, and Shakespeare simply combined the two passages: "A *sibyl* . . . In her *prophetic fury*" (72, 74).

Berni influenced other elements of this scene. From the preceding stanza 9, for example, came *"eye"* ("occhi") and *"out of the way"* ("tanto in là"); *"darling"* ("fanciulleto") is from the last line of stanza 8. Shakespeare's debt to Berni in *Othello* may end here; in Acts IV and V he would make greater use of Cinthio than he had done in Acts I–III.

It is clear, then, that Shakespeare had at least three Italian works (or extracts from them) in front of him as he wrote *Othello* – Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Berni's *Orlando Innamorato*. We also know that he used the same stanzas of Ariosto's *Furioso* as he wrote some twenty lines of *Love's Labour's Lost*, that is V.ii.638–659, in which Armado appears as Hector.

We shall see that Shakespeare followed a similar course in his use of Berni's poem. He used the same stanzas of the *Innamorato* as a source for both *Othello* and Act V scene ii of *Love's Labour's*, just as he had done with the *Furioso*. The only difference is that he used Berni much more extensively than Ariosto.

We have seen that there were specific reasons why Shakespeare chose to consult Berni's canto 51 as he wrote *Othello*. Was this also true of *Love's Labour's*? His borrowings in V.ii begin with the entry of the first Worthy, Costard the clown, at line 543, and end at line 719, "Exeunt Worthies", or soon after. It appears that he consulted

14. Florio, "bottino".

his Italian sources while writing the whole of the Worthies scene, and rarely, if ever elsewhere.[15] There are several reasons why he might turn to the Italian epics while he had this scene in mind. In the first place, the stories of Orlando would naturally remind him of the Worthies, since Charlemagne was one of the original Nine, and he is in fact mentioned in Berni's stanza 7. Secondly, Berni introduced his pagan kings one by one, much as Shakespeare brings on his Worthies. The brief description of each king (and occasionally his coat of arms) to some extent resembles Shakespeare's treatment of the Worthies. The comic grotesqueness of the Worthies also recalls that of the pagans. Thirdly, by a chance similarity which must have amused Shakespeare, the pagans are about to invade France. "They must pass into *France*" ("in Francia devono passare", Argomento). Two of Shakespeare's Worthies, he implies, desire to invade "France", or the Princess, sexually: Pompey, who wishes to "lay my arms before the legs of this sweet lass of France" (551), and Hector, who "loves her by the foot" (664).

Berni's first pagan king, Drudinasso, enters in stanza 8, and Shakespeare turned to this stanza for the entry of his first Worthy, Pompey (also a pagan). Here he found *"is come"* ("Venuto è"), *arms* ("Arme"), *great* ("grossa"), *before* ("d'avante"), *"shield"* ("scudo") and *"in field"* ("In campo"). He reproduced these words in Pompey's quatrain: ". . . Pompey surnamed the *Great,* / That oft *in field* with targe and *shield* . . . / . . . *am come* by chance, / And lay my *arms before* the legs . . . *France*" (548–551). We expect Costard to say "before the *feet*" of the Princess, and the phrase was probably suggested to Shakespeare by the presence of "feet" ("piante", rhyming with "avante") as well as "arms" in this stanza.

For the next sixty lines, Shakespeare took little or nothing from Berni,[16] but at the end of Holofernes' appearance as Judas Maccabaeus he needed an excuse to divide "Judas" into "ass", and to find it he turned to Berni's stanza 4. This stanza alludes to Aesop's fable of the ass who put on the lion's skin. Shakespeare borrows this allusion, and from now on he pays much attention to stanza 4.

15. There are signs of possible borrowing towards the end of V.i, where the Worthies discuss their show. Berowne's soliloquy at III.ii.169 is almost certainly dependent on Boiardo/Berni. See n. 4.

16. He may have used Boiardo for the speeches of Alexander. See n. 4.

Stanza 4

Parla la terra, la polvere è sassi.
Quando *parlar* non posson le persone;
Chi dell'*onore* altrui *coprendo* vassi,
Somiglia quell'uccel, che del pavone,
E *l'asino*, onde ancor *gran riso fassi*,
Che si vesti le spoglie del *lione:*
E con tanta *vergogna* loro e *scorno*
Alla *fine* ambe*due nudi restorno.*

("The earth speaks, the dust and the rocks, when people cannot speak. He who goes about covered with the honour of someone else resembles that bird which wore the peacock's feathers, and the ass that put on the lion's skin, which is still the source of much laughter. And in the end both of them remained naked, though covered with so much shame and ridicule".)

Shakespeare used the lion/ass fable merely as a device to create the pun on "Jud-as". Holofernes is no *"lion"*, but he is an *"ass"* (618–622). The following lines confirm the debt to Berni beyond doubt, since *stay* ("restorno") and *end* ("fine") both occur in the last line of stanza 4.

Boyet. . . . Nay, why dost thou *stay*?
Dumaine. For the latter *end* of his name.
(V.ii.620–21)

Five lines later Shakespeare continued to use stanza 4, together with stanza 8.

Berowne. *Hide* thy *head*, Achilles! Here *comes* Hector *in arms.*
Dunmaine. Though my *mocks come* home . . .
(V.ii.627–29)

In stanza 4 we find *"hide"* ("coprendo") and *"mocks"* ("gran riso", "scorno"), and in stanza 8 *"head"* ("capo"), *"come"* and *"in arms"* ("armato").

One trio of words from Berni evidently stuck in Shakespeare's mind. In the above passage he uses *arms, mocks* and *come* in close proximity. He had already used this combination earlier in the scene: *mocker, come, arms* (545–551). He also used it in a Berni passage in *Othello*: *come, weapons, mock* (I.ii.58–69).

For Armado's appearance as Hector (631–659), Shakespeare confined his borrowings almost entirely to Ariosto, but at line 657 he turned again to Berni, since *"war-man"* is a literal translation of *"guerriero"* (st. 7). "I will forward with my device", continues Armado (659–60). "Device" here probably means his dramatic "show", but it may also refer to his heraldic shield. If so, it corresponds to "gonfalone" (Argomento), which can mean "an emblem" (*DDLI*, 4). *"Re"* ("king", st. 8) parallels Armado's *"royalty"* (660). *"Speak"* (662) and *"foot"* (664) echo *"parlar"* (st. 4) and *"piante"* (st. 8).

There are no definite borrowings from either Ariosto or Berni between lines 665 and 682, but at line 683 Shakespeare probably returned to the *Innamorato* for Pompey's "challenge" to the Braggart, Armado. This would be an appropriate point to consult Berni, since his references to Charlemagne and the paladins suggest chivalrous tournaments and challenges. Berni also refers to *bragging* (st. 6), and Armado is "Braggart" in speech prefixes throughout this scene. At line 698 we find a clear reminder of Berni and *Othello*. "You will *lose your reputation*", Moth warns Armado, which echoes both Iago's warning to the "bragging" Moor and Cassio's "I have *lost my reputation*" (II.iii.258–59). Earlier, Costard's *fight*, *sword* and *arms* (690–92) are paralleled by *"pugnano"* (Argomento), *"spada"* (st. 5) and *"Arme"* (st. 8).

Costard now starts to undress: "Pompey is *uncasing* for the combat" (697). But Armado refuses to remove his "outer garments",[17] which would reveal *"the naked truth . . . I go* woolward for *penance"* (705–06). This episode was surely inspired by *"disfar"* ("undo", st. 6) and "sopravesta" (st. 8) – Berni's word for "outer garments" or "surcoat". In Berni *"the truth"* ("il vero", st. 5) is separated from *"penance"* ("Pena", st. 6) by only six words, and *"naked"* ("nudi", st. 4) occurs nine lines earlier. "I *go* woolward" may also owe something to "they *go naked*" ("vanno nudi") from stanza 11, especially as the line continues with the apt "like a foolish thing" ("come cosa stolta").

In Moth's following speech the words *"True"*, *"want"*, *"he wore"* and *"heart"* echo *"vero"* (st. 5), *"carestia"* (st. 2), *"si vesti"* (st. 4) and *"core"* (st. 9).

The Quarto stage direction now reads "Enter a *Messenger*". The Italian word for *"messenger"*, *posta*, occurs in the line after *"vanno*

17. See the Oxford Shakespeare edition, ed. G.R. Hibbard (1994), note to line 691.

nudi" (st. 11). The poem continues: "They are made for death [literally, "the sword"], because their *life* is immediately taken away" ("fatti pel brando/Perchè la vita sia lor tosto tolta"). This fusion of life and death is repeated in the Princess's reaction to Marcadé's entrance: "*Dead*, for my *life*!" (715).

Shakespeare also echoes Berni in Marcadé's similarly self-cancelling reply: *"my tale is told"* (715). The last line of stanza 11 begins with *"Detto"*, which literally means "told". But *detto* can also be a noun, meaning "tale, story". So Marcadé's statement is contained in the one word *"detto"*. Shakespeare also follows Berni's order of words in this passage. *Go woolward (naked), Messenger, life* and *tale/told* appear in the same order in stanza 11.

Armado's final speech contains *"For mine own part"* ("parmi", st. 7), *"day"* ("giorno", st. 13), *"wrong"* ("error", st. 5), *"discretion"* ("discrezione", st. 1) and *"soldier"* ("guerriero", st. 7). Here, or possibly two lines later, Shakespeare's borrowing from Berni ends.

What preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this new evidence? First, it is clear that Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian was much greater than has been supposed. There is no doubt, for instance, that he was reading Berni in the original Italian, and not in translation, as he wrote *Othello*, I–III and *Love's Labour's Lost*, Vi.ii. We can tell this from several pieces of evidence: for example, the play on *ricco/ricciuta*, his awareness of the three separate meanings of *bottino*, and his translation of *posta* as "messenger" (in the original "a posta" means "on purpose"). The evidence, however, does not suggest that he was fluent in Italian, nor that he had read much of the *Furioso* or *Innamorato*. His borrowing seems to have been strictly confined to two comparatively short passages, both of which were chosen with *Othello* in mind. This limited access implies that he was unable to read Italian with ease. If so, the extracts were probably chosen for him by someone who knew both works much better than he did.

Secondly, the pattern of his borrowing in *Love's Labour's Lost* supports the theory of a later revision in that play. With two possible exceptions[18] he borrows only when the Worthies are on stage. Such limited use is plausibly explained by revision at a later date. Moreover, the distribution of borrowings within the scene

18. See n. 15.

also suggests revision. They are not spread evenly through it, but occur in a series of short bursts, as if Shakespeare is retouching the scene as he reads it through.

This theory would explain several other anomalies. The remarkable "Silence of the Ladies", for example, who all, except the Princess, sit through the entire pageant without uttering a word, suggests that they were not on stage during an earlier version of the scene. Again, the exchanges between Marcadé and the Princess both contain Berni material and are wrongly printed as prose in Q and F. It looks as if Marcadé was a later addition, and that previously the Princess was told of her father's death offstage.

Finally, the new information changes our view of Shakespeare's position among his fellow-writers. In particular, it brings him close to Spenser, since they are the only writers that we know of who used both Ariosto and Boiardo (Berni) as sources.[19] We can be sure that Shakespeare knew of Spenser's devotion to the Romantic epic, and was imitating him deliberately. But it is also possible that Spenser took an active interest in Shakespeare's study of the Italian writers, and gave him encouragement and advice. This is the more likely since both men had the same generous patrons – the fifth Earl of Derby and his wife. Spenser's description of the poet Aetion in *Colin Clout's Come Again* (1595), who is sometimes thought to be Shakespeare, certainly fits a writer whom he knows to be influenced by epic poetry.

> Whose Muse, full of high thoughts invention,
> Doth like himself Heroically sound.[20]

If Aetion is Shakespeare, the revision of *Love's Labour's Lost* must have taken place by 1595.[21]

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19. A.L. Sells, *The Italian Influence in English Poetry* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), 162–75.
20. *The shorter poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram *et al.* (Yale, 1989), 543.
21. For information and advice I would like to thank Phil Cooke, John and Michael Cronin, David Farley-Hills, Lynne Press and especially Peter Brand and Maura Favretto.