Daniel Javitch. *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. Pp. x, 205.

In this excellent study Daniel Javitch aims to investigate how the *Orlando Furioso* “first entered the European poetic canon” (p. 3). The author claims that canonicity “is a cultural production rather than something that literary works innately possess” (p. 3); he, therefore, is not interested in ascertaining which intrinsic aspects of the poem “facilitated” or “invited some of the processes of canonization” (p. 4) which can be detected through the several early commentaries and critical responses. His concern lies mainly “with the reception and the perception of the poem in the sixteenth century,” and the efforts made by scholars of the time “to establish that the *Furioso* either descended from or was the modern equivalent of the canonical epics of antiquity” (p. 4).

In the first chapter the author examines the vast success of the poem among sixteenth-century audiences. Such success is confirmed by various factors; first, it had a very large number of editions, which “between 1521 and 1584 . . . embodied virtually every one of the particular typographical physiognomies that Venetian publishers had devised for the different kinds of readers who made up their market” (pp. 13-14). Second, the *Furioso* was present in libraries such as those of Florentine merchants, where chivalric literature was most certainly not very popular. Finally it was used as a textbook in school curricula. Javitch relates this success to two major factors: on one hand, the *Furioso* “was perceived to best fill the need for a modern equivalent of the canonical epics of antiquity at a time when such a need was felt with particular intensity” (pp. 14-15). On the other hand, it solicited a large response among the learned and the scholars. According to Javitch, “one needed only consider the relative absence of discussion concerning the *Innamorato* [that is, the work by Boiardo which Ariosto was continuing, whose fortune quickly declined toward the middle of the century] . . . to realize how much the ongoing popularity and reputation of the *Furioso* had to do with the critical attention it was given” (p. 19).

Some objections could be raised concerning these points. As for the first, it is clear that the need for a specific literary work was often felt at various times and in different cultural environments. Nevertheless, such a work was not invented or created when it did not exist. To remain within the boundaries of the Italian literary tradition, one can think of the need for a great tragedy and a great playwright which was felt from the end of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth; notwithstanding the large number of authors who produced tragedies in those times, none of them enjoyed a substantial popularity and a unique reputation until a great poet such as Vittorio Alfieri started writing in the last decades of the 1800s.

As for the second, it is unlikely that the “critical attention” given to the *Furioso* conditioned the tastes and choices of middle class and courtly readers. Florentine merchants would hardly have been interested in the poem just because there was so much discussion about it among the learned. At the same time, some efforts to canonize

in a similar way the *Morgante* by Luigi Pulci or the *Innamorato* were made, but were not successful. Consequently, it seems clear that the success of a specific work at a given time has to do mostly with the intrinsic aspects of the work, not with external factors. Again, one may think of the success of other works at different times (such as the *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Tasso or the *Adone* by Marino) to realize that success is conditioned by characteristics of the work itself. Also, as happened with the poem by Marino, such success does not necessarily last forever. The writings of Ariosto are a case in point. In conclusion, when sixteenth-century culture canonized the *Furioso* rather than other poems (such as the *Italia liberata dai Goti* by Trissino, which could much more easily be assimilated to the canonical epics of antiquity), it did so because the work was very successful among all kinds of readers; the *Furioso* did not, on the contrary, become popular because that culture had canonized it.

Such objections do not limit in any way the value of the main body of Javitch's research, which is an accurate and thorough analysis of sixteenth-century learned commentaries on the *Furioso*. The reader has the opportunity to peruse the critical responses the poem elicited from both its supporters and opponents. Javitch must be credited also for signalling changes in attitude toward the poem because of external factors which interfered on various occasions with the reactions of its cultured audience; namely, the diffusion of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the publication of Tasso's *Liberata*, the issue of the relations between ancient classical literatures and modern Italian poetry, and so on. As a final result, contemporary Ariosto scholars can find in this penetrating research a complete and informative survey of sixteenth-century criticism on the *Furioso* and the ways in which that criticism influenced the history of the poem's editions after Ariosto published its final version in 1532.

Among the many facts brought to light by the author, one should mention at least the chapter on John Harington's English translation of the poem, published in 1591 preceded by a "Briefe Apologie." At first glance, the presence of such a chapter may seem rather odd in a book which deals with Italian sixteenth-century criticism on the *Furioso*. On the contrary, it is very much to the point: Javitch shows the extent to which the English translator was conditioned by that criticism. Not only did he make the obvious effort to present the poem as a modern classic in his introductory remarks and commentaries, but he also felt obliged to modify the original in his translation whenever he thought that Ariosto's lines and images would be inadequate in relation to the ideal he was trying to offer his readers.

Contemporary Ariosto studies will profit highly from Javitch's book. Any future research on the reception of the *Furioso* in the Cinquecento will be indebted to this work, which will stand as a model for any similar survey of other masterpieces of Western civilization.

ANTONIO FRANCESCHETTI, *University of Toronto*