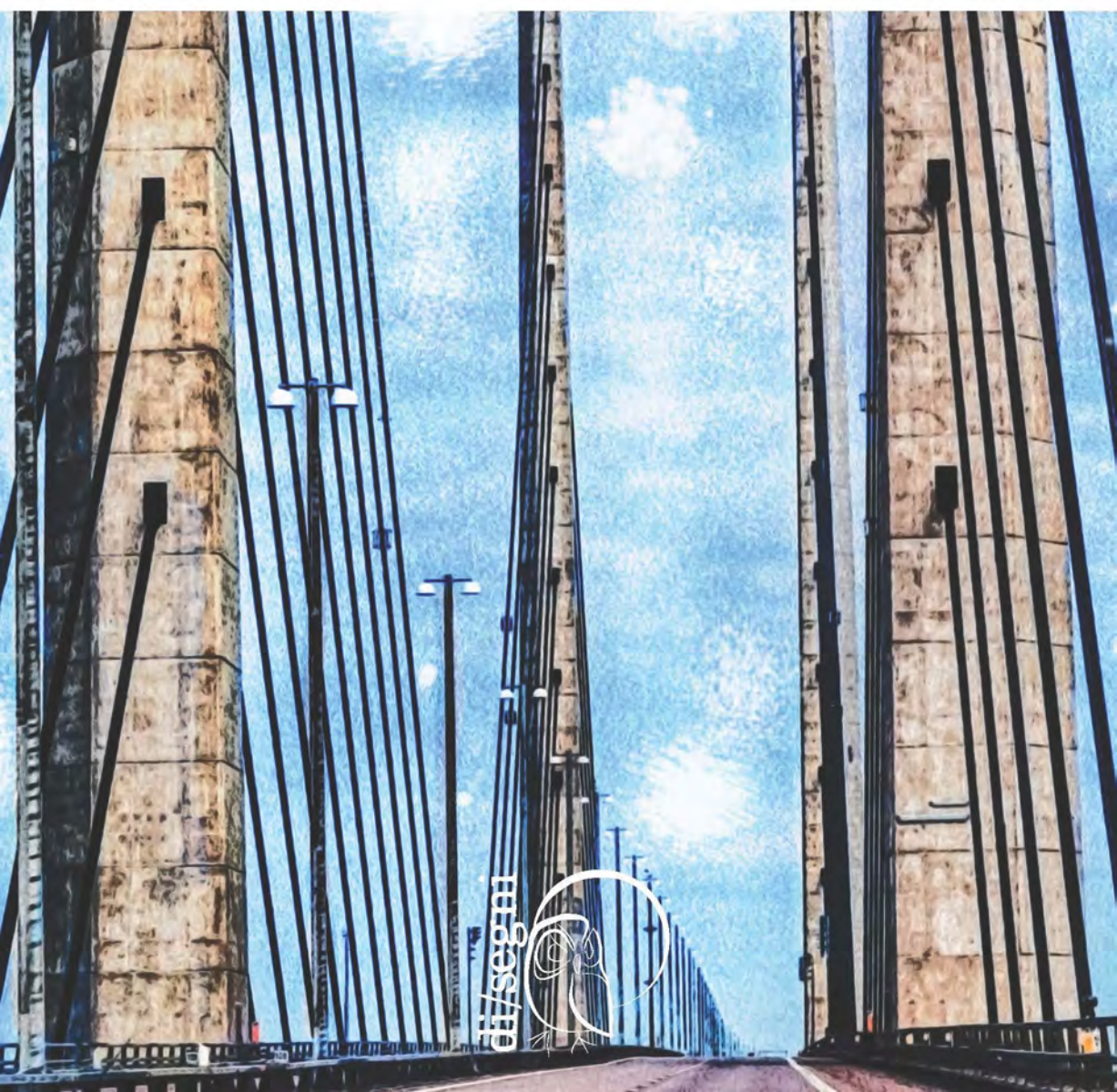


# BRIDGES TO SCANDINAVIA

Edited by Andrea Meregalli and Camilla Storskog











# BRIDGES TO SCANDINAVIA

Edited by **Andrea Meregalli and Camilla Storskog**

di/segni

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere

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Università degli Studi di Milano

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e Camilla Storskog per l'insieme del volume  
ISBN 978-88-6705-412-1

ILLUSTRAZIONE DI COPERTINA:  
*The Øresund Bridge*  
Elaborazione grafica su fotografia di Flora Cusi

n° 15  
Collana sottoposta a double blind peer review  
ISSN: 2282-2097

**Grafica:**  
Raúl Díaz Rosales

**Composizione:**  
Ledizioni

**Disegno del logo:**  
Paola Turino

STAMPATO A MILANO  
NEL MESE DI GIUGNO 2016

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## A MOCK OLD NORSE POEM IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MILAN: FRANCESCO SAVERIO QUADRIO'S *VERSI IN LINGUA RUNICA*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In 1751 a young Pietro Verri (1728-97) published in Milan a collection of comic poetry by various authors under the title *Borlanda impasticciata* (*Pomace Pasty*).<sup>1</sup> The book includes a text by Francesco Saverio Quadrio (1695-1756) presented as *Versi in lingua runica* (*Verses in the Runic Language*; Quadrio 1751), which indisputably shows some knowledge of Old Norse literature and culture by its author, as well as his interest in, if not understanding of, the Old Norse language. The aim of this essay is to identify the author's sources and investigate their use and treatment by comparing and contrasting some of Quadrio's most significant passages with the material he had access to. This will lead to a better understanding of his work and purpose in the context of the miscellaneous volume it is part of.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete title, see References under Quadrio 1751. The approximate English translation tries to convey some idea of the Lombard word *borlanda*, which indicates the remains of must or of distillation processes, also used to feed livestock ("broda, e specialmente quella che deriva dalla fabbricazione degli spiriti, e che si dà con biade a mangiare a bestie bovine"; Angiolini 1897, 126 s.v.). Cherubini explains the word as 'claptrap' or 'rambling speech', with explicit mention of *Borlanda impasticciata* (1814, I, 47 s.v.). The culinary metaphor is recurrent throughout the collection.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Giovanni Bonfadini for first drawing my attention to this text. Some preliminary results of the present investigation are anticipated in his essay on Quadrio's linguistic works (Bonfadini 2010, 507-08).

2. FRANCESCO SAVERIO QUADRIO AND HIS *VERSI IN LINGUA RUNICA*

Born in the Valtelline, Francesco Saverio Quadrio joined the Society of Jesus in Venice in 1713. As a teacher and scholar, he mainly devoted himself to the study of history and especially literature, the field of his most significant contributions. After the publication of his first book, *Della poesia italiana* (*On Italian Poetry*, 1734), in which he advocated a return to Italian Renaissance models in contrast to seventeenth-century imitation of foreign works, he came into conflict with his superiors, and in the mid-1740s he fled Italy, travelling to Paris through Switzerland. After his return, in the late 1740s, he obtained the pope's permission to pass to the secular clergy.<sup>3</sup>

In 1741 Quadrio was authorised by his congregation to move to Milan in order to pursue his scientific interests. The Duchy of Milan was then under Austrian rule, and the city would soon become, especially from the 1760s onwards, one of the most significant centres of the Italian Enlightenment. Here, Quadrio had the chance to meet the most outstanding figures in contemporary Milanese culture and was granted access to the richest private libraries in town. He also became a member of the *Accademia dei Trasformati* (Academy of the Transformed), a literary society founded in 1743 at the urging of Count Giuseppe Maria Imbonati (1688-1768). It counted more than a hundred members, including significant intellectuals and writers, and its activities, periodically organised in private and public meetings, were quite popular. The institution, however, only prospered until Imbonati's death, then faced a rapid decline. The academicians cultivated diverse cultural interests, including poetry in Latin and in the Milanese vernacular, often following a Bernesque inspiration, more inclined to amusement than engagement: “una poesia fatta più di versi che di cose, eccellente intrattenimento per gentiluomini e gentildonne in vena di esercizi letterari” (Bezzola 1982, 358).<sup>4</sup> In some respects, however, it did anticipate the Enlightenment ideas that were about to blossom around it (Gennaro 2000, 302-03; Capra 2002, 118).

Quadrio had been a member of the Academy since its birth in 1743, and after his death he was commemorated in a public meeting (Bezzola 1982, 359). It is in this context that he wrote his *Versi in lingua runica* as a contribution to Verri's *Borlanda impasticciata*, which collects texts by various academicians (Gaspari 1999). Pietro Verri, who would later become one of the leading voices of the Italian Enlightenment, was a member of the *Accademia dei Trasformati* in the 1750s (Barbarisi 1998, 205-06), though never a very active participant: “la sua presenza non fu particolarmente im-

<sup>3</sup> On Quadrio's life see especially Monteforte 2010. The collection of essays edited by Claudia Berra (2010), at the urging of Gennaro Barbarisi, is the most extensive publication on Quadrio's life and works, with a detailed discussion of previous literature on diverse subjects.

<sup>4</sup> “A poetry made more of verses than of things, excellent entertainment for ladies and gentlemen fancying some literary activity.” Translations are mine.

pegnata, visto che, portato com'era a lasciar memoria di ogni sua vicenda, non ne parlò più che tanto (e solo per dirne male!)” (Barbarisi 1998, 207).<sup>5</sup> The later spokesman of Enlightenment ideas had not found his way yet, and scholars do not regard his early literary attempts as particularly successful. Unsurprisingly, *Borlanda impasticciata* has deserved only scant attention. It is described as an “esercizio di goliardia collettiva” (Arato 2002, 156),<sup>6</sup> “prodotto tipico di un clima bernesco caratteristico di quegli anni ma pure documento di un’innegabile vocazione burlesca” (Anglani 1999, 652, and 2012, 22),<sup>7</sup> a humorous vein that will give riper fruits in Verri’s later satirical production, in which the divertissement is combined with critical engagement to express a satirising intent and a moral perspective (Anglani 1999, 651-52, and 2012, 23-24). The author himself later discarded this book by not including it among the juvenile works collected in the hand-written volume known as *Cose varie* (*Diverse Things*) compiled in 1763 (Anglani 1999, 652, and 2012, 22; Capra 2002, 119-20).

Products of the literary taste of their times, the texts collected in *Borlanda impasticciata* ridicule the clumsy poetic attempts of a contemporary pleader called Plodes, here anagrammatised as Pedsol and presented as an Eritrean poet. Pedsol’s works are preceded by various encomiastic poems in his honour, written in various metres and in many Italian vernaculars and foreign languages, including Greek and Latin, most Romance languages, and English.<sup>8</sup> This variety aims to farcically show how the poet’s fame could reach the farthest regions.

Quadrio’s *Versi in lingua runica* is one of these laudatory texts, and combines two interests of its author, literature and linguistics. To the latter Quadrio devotes his *Lettera intorno all’origine e alla propagazione delle Lingue* (*Letter on the Origin and Propagation of Languages*, 1756), a rather traditional compilation of various scholars’ opinions on the subject (Bonfadini 2010, 499-507). By contrast, the study of literature is far more significant in Quadrio’s scholarly activity, whose major achievement in this field is an extensive history of universal literature, *Della storia e della ragione d’ogni poesia* (*On the History and Reason of All Poetry*), published in five volumes (volumes II and III consist of two books each) between 1739 and 1752.

Scholars have underlined the limitations of Quadrio’s work: the author collects a large amount of data and details – presented in a learned, rather pedantic way – and yet lacks the ability to give a personal interpretation

<sup>5</sup> “His participation was not very engaged considering that, keen as he was on keeping a record of every event in his life, he only talked little about it (and only to criticise it!).”

<sup>6</sup> “Practice of collective witticism.”

<sup>7</sup> “A typical product of the Bernesque climate of those years, which nevertheless documents an undeniable humorous vein.”

<sup>8</sup> A Celtic poem is sometimes mentioned among the contents of the collection (cf. Gaspari 1999), but this is probably an erroneous reference to Quadrio’s ‘Runic’ verses, since the volume does not include any texts in a Celtic language.

and evaluation of this material within a coherent critical reading (cf., e.g., Monteforte 2010, 71-74, with further references). On the other hand, there is general appreciation of the author's vast knowledge of his field of studies, which is unequalled in his time and makes of his work an important source of information, especially on lesser-known foreign literatures. Arato describes Quadrio as "un erudito vero" with "inesauribile curiosità" (2002, 157, 172),<sup>9</sup> even though his work is "minacciosamente prolissa" (2002, 166).<sup>10</sup> Dionisotti underlines his "tendenza a semplificare e nei casi dubbi a sospendere il giudizio, e insomma a vincere i predecessori e competitori piuttosto per il numero che per la qualità dei reperti" (1985, 839),<sup>11</sup> but he praises his wide chronological and spatial perspective, which extends to otherwise unknown literary traditions, as in the case of northern and eastern Europe (1985, 859).<sup>12</sup>

As for Quadrio's use of his sources, it has been observed that his knowledge of foreign literature is mainly indirect, firstly because of obvious linguistic barriers – with the exception of Greek, Latin, and French texts – and secondly for his need to extract relevant, synthetic data from such a vast field. His work presents a large number of bibliographic references, though these are not always accurate and reliable. The opinions of other writers, such as Voltaire's dislike for Shakespeare, are often repeated without any critical analysis, more for practical reasons than on the basis of a shared stance (Dionisotti 1985, 861-62; Arato 2002, 176).

Quadrio's encounter with Old Norse literature can likely be traced back to his research for this extensive work.<sup>13</sup> However, he is sometimes unable to distinguish clearly among various peoples and languages, and his conception of the 'northern' languages is very broad, expanding on a wide geographical area that also includes Slavic languages, like Polish. In the second volume, he discusses the Danes and Norwegians together with the Etruscans, Pelasgians, and Celts (Quadrio 1741, 30-32). His initial judgement echoes a wide-spread negative look on exotic literary traditions (Dionisotti 1985, 860):

Quanto all'altre settentrionali nazioni noi l'opera gitteremmo,  
e l' tempo, se volessimo perderci a investigare la natura delle  
loro Lingue, o de' loro Versi. Que' popoli rigidi, perchè sempre  
in ghiaccio, e in gelate nevi giacenti; e quindi naturalmente di-

<sup>9</sup> "Authentically learned"; "inexhaustible curiosity".

<sup>10</sup> "Menacingly verbose."

<sup>11</sup> "Inclination to simplify and, in uncertain cases, to suspend judgement. Briefly, he stands out among his predecessors and competitors more for the amount than for the quality of his findings."

<sup>12</sup> See also Rinaldi 2010; Sinopoli 2010; Bonfatti 2010, 210-26.

<sup>13</sup> A comprehensive analysis of the role of Nordic literature within Quadrio's work remains a desideratum, which transcends the limits of this contribution, although it would probably shed more light on the author's knowledge and appreciation of this subject.

sprezzatori d'ogni musica soavità, si recherebbono ad onta il lasciarsi dai vezzi della poesia addolcire [...]. Le loro favelle, dure, ferree, e incondite, ne manifestano da se stesse l'antipatia ad ogni concento (Quadrio 1739, 639).<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, his attitude becomes more positive the more he gets acquainted with foreign traditions, and his work finally contributes to redefine and re-evaluate the role of distant literatures, enlarging and refreshing the scope of the discussion of literature in a wider European context (Dionisotti 1985, 860-62). This includes his finally more positive stance on marginal literary traditions, like the Nordic one: "Un simile allargamento modernistico, in qualche misura anomalo entro il panorama erudito settecentesco, si accompagna poi a uno speciale interesse per le zone irregolari o marginali della nostra tradizione; un interesse che sembra andare oltre l'esigenza documentaria" (Rinaldi 2010, 118).<sup>15</sup>

Quadrio's acquired expertise in Old Norse literature, among many other traditions, is at the basis of his contribution to *Borlanda impasticciata*. Against this backdrop, we can now turn our attention to his *Versi in lingua runica*,<sup>16</sup> by first analysing the 'Runic' text itself and then considering the commentary that accompanies it.

### 3. THE 'RUNIC' TEXT

The 'Runic' poem is introduced by a title specifying that these verses, composed by a poet named Skogon Hnufa, were found, along with an Italian translation by Ser Ghirigoro di Val Mugello, in a codex of the Magliabechi collection. They are here published with annotations by the academician Geronzio Campanili, nicknamed "lo Stracotto" (VLR, xxxxii),<sup>17</sup> actually a pseudonym of Quadrio, who, like all contributors to *Borlanda impasticciata*, uses a pen name. The 'Runic' text and the Italian poem presented as its "versione" (VLR, xxxxiii) are printed synoptically on two columns. Both the

<sup>14</sup> "As for the other northern nations, we would waste our work and time if we decided to investigate the nature of their languages or poetry. Those rigid peoples – since they are always surrounded by ice and frosted snow and, therefore, naturally despise every musical sweetness – would consider it shameful if they were sweetened by the charm of poetry [...]. Their harsh, iron-like, and uncultivated languages themselves show their aversion to any harmony." Unless otherwise stated, the use of italics and capital letters follows the original editions in quotations from Quadrio's works and his sources.

<sup>15</sup> "This modernistic attitude, which is somehow anomalous in the context of eighteenth-century learning, is followed by a special interest in unusual or marginal areas of our tradition. This interest seems to transcend mere documentary needs."

<sup>16</sup> Henceforth VLR in references, followed by page or line numbers (the latter distinguished by 'l.'). Line numbers always refer to the 'Runic' text on pp. xxxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>17</sup> "The Overcooked."

title and the texts present a considerable number of footnotes, which contain the commentary and make up the longer part of Quadrio's work.

Here is the text in the 'Runic' language:

Syгур Pedsol folld dir  
Men ranngrida dropar  
Suarar er vvest kopar apur iafna

Na strondum i mar tafna  
Leikur dan siot hymne  
Arbisk, Turkstan, Persimne a yta komi

Kongs mapur sviom stromi  
Na mordvargar thullù  
Sumon thaktan lullu kvelur liora.

Sal vveit eg gulle shora  
Nordur vid gullbiarta  
Godheim skogul meth starta Alldurs ann morda.  
(VLR, xxxxi-xxxiv)<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, the text as a whole is deprived of any meaning. However, it is quite easy to recognise single words, inflected forms, and expressions of the Old Norse language, which will be commented on below. Formally, the Old Norse words are combined so as to imitate a poem whose structure can be described with the traditional tools of Italian metrics: four tercets, each consisting of two shorter lines with six or seven syllables and a final longer line with ten to twelve syllables.<sup>19</sup>

This structure is likely to be derived from the contiguous Italian text, also written by Quadrio, and presented as the Italian 'translation'. In fact, this is an independent text, a prophecy foreseeing the birth of Pedsol, celebrated as one of the greatest poets of all times, in keeping with the general content of *Borlanda impasticciata*:

<sup>18</sup> What is here transcribed as the final line is printed in two lines in the original, the second of which starting with "Alldurs", whence the capital letter (here retained). However, this word is preceded by larger indentation than the other lines, so it is meant as the continuation of the previous line, which is too long for the space available on the page. The rhyme scheme and the Italian 'translation' (with 12 lines) confirm this interpretation. With this final long line (l. 12), the tercet structure is respected consistently.

<sup>19</sup> The number of syllables may vary slightly if we apply synalepha, as usual in Italian metrics (e.g., "Persimne a yta", l. 6; my italics), but the counting is obviously artificial, since it would be pointless to assume the use of metrical devices in this meaningless text. Quadrio's intention is apparent despite single details.

Pedsol nascerà un giorno,  
Che farà una Borlanda,  
Che non sarà vivanda d'ogni bocca.

Lungi la turba sciocca  
Da' nebbiati suoi versi:  
D'Arabi, Turchi, e Persi essa fia il sugo.

De Fisofoli un zugo  
In quella farsi io miro:  
Lui le Muse la ordiro in lettere d'oro.

Tessete a lui l'alloro  
Liete future etati;  
E ornatene de' Vati il Culattario.  
(VLR, xxxxi-xxxiv)<sup>20</sup>

This Italian poem consistently presents tercets of two seven-syllable lines (*settenari*) and one eleven-syllable line (*endecasillabo*), the two most common lines in the Italian poetic tradition. Both the 'Runic' and the Italian texts display the same rhyme scheme: all final lines in the tercets have an internal rhyme with the previous line and a final rhyme with the first line of the following tercet (l. 12 has only internal rhyme with l. 11).

The author's aim is to present an 'Italian translation' that formally abides by the metric characteristics of the 'Runic original'. To this effect, he produces a fake original text, combining words probably chosen for their number of syllables and, when appropriate, rhyme possibilities, and it is only reasonable to assume that he must have used some sources to collect the necessary lexical material. In fact, in his commentary, Quadrio explicitly refers to some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century editions and studies on the Old Norse language and literature, beginning with "l' *Edda* di Semundo Frode, e quella di Snorrone Sturlusons, amendue congiuntamente pubblicate in Copenhagen l'anno 1665. in 4. per opera e studio di Pietro Giovanni Resenio" (VLR, xxxii).<sup>21</sup> This mention of Peder Hansen Resen (1625-88)'s 1665 editions of Snorri's *Edda* and of *Völuspá* and *Hávamál* is followed by references to other scholars and works: Thomas Bartholin the Younger

<sup>20</sup> "Pedsol will be born one day, / who will make a pomace, / which will not be food for every mouth. // The foolish mob may stay away / from his foggy verses. / It will be a distillation of Arabs, Turks, and Persians. // I see it become / a fruitcake of philosophers. / The Muses created it for him in golden letters. // Wreath laurel for him, / happy future ages, / and adorn with it the poets' cesspool." This is a literal rendition of the content of the poem, whose main quality, however, resides in the choice and play on words from the Italian literary tradition (as an example, see below, the remark on the word "Fisofoli").

<sup>21</sup> "Sæmundr fróði's and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, both published together in quarto by Peder Hansen Resen in Copenhagen in 1665."

(1659-90), Olof Rudbeck the Elder (1630-1702), Johann Georg Keyßler (1693-1743), Johan Peringskiöld (1654-1720), Henry Spelman (1562-1641), and Ole Worm (1588-1654). These names were certainly known to Quadrio from his work on *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia*, and some of their books were probably at his disposal in libraries he could visit in Milan or during his journeys abroad. The index contained in volume V includes references to Bartholin, Keyßler, Rudbeck, Spelman, Worm, as well as to Snorri Sturluson (Quadrio 1752, 360, 543, 686, 716, 721, 775).

If we consider the orthographic characteristics of the words reproduced by Quadrio, it is possible to recognise precise correspondences, with occasional minor changes, between the lexical material combined in *VLR* and the excerpts from Old Norse texts available in one specific work that the author mentions, *Antiquitates selectae Septentrionales et Celticae* (*Selected Nordic and Celtic Antiquities*, 1720) by Johann Georg Keyßler,<sup>22</sup> a relationship also confirmed, as will be shown below, by the information given in the commentary. This can be exemplified through some lines quoted by Keyßler from the eddic poems *Völuspá* and *Grímnismál*, as well as from *Hákonarmál*, a panegyric composed by the famous tenth-century skald Eyvindr Finnson, called 'skáldaspillir' ('Plagiarist'), in honour of the Norwegian king Hákon góði Haraldsson:<sup>23</sup>

*Völuspá* (Keyßler 1720, 120, 122, 124-25):<sup>24</sup> 57,2 "Sygur folld i Mar" (ll. 1, 4); 57,3 "Hverfa aff himne" (possibly l. 5, with *y* for *i*); 57,7 "Leikur haar hite" (l. 5); 64,3 "Gulle thaktan" (ll. 9, 10); 64,7 "Og vm Alldurs Daga" (l. 12); 38,1 "Sal weit eg standa" (l. 10); 38,3 "Ná strondum a" (l. 4);<sup>25</sup> 38,4 "Nordur horffa Dyr" (l. 11); 38,5 "Falla Eitur Dropar" (l. 2); 38,6 "Inn vmm Liora" (l. 9); 39,3 "Men mein suarar" (ll. 2, 3); 39,4 "Og Mordvargar" (l. 8);<sup>26</sup> 39,7 "Kvelur Nüdhoggur" (l. 9); between lines 39,4 and 39,7, Keyßler prints in verse the insertion of Snorri's *Edda* (Snorri Sturluson 2005,

<sup>22</sup> Quadrio uses the form "Keysler" (*VLR*, xxxii), as on the front page of his source, while I adopt the now current form.

<sup>23</sup> The following quotations reproduce Keyßler's text preceded by standard strophe and line numbers based on the following editions: for *Völuspá*, Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 9 (strophes 38-39), 13-15 (strophes 57 and 64); for *Grímnismál*, Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 58-59 (strophe 8), 64 (strophe 36); for *Hákonarmál*, Fulk 2012, 192. Italics are mine and signal words or expressions that can be found in Quadrio's text, on the lines indicated in parentheses. Since the content of these texts is irrelevant for Quadrio's use of them, no translation is given here. The study of Keyßler's own sources and of his interest in them falls beyond the scope of this analysis.

<sup>24</sup> I follow the order in which Keyßler inserts the strophes into his discourse: 57, 64, 38-39 (the last two from Snorri's *Edda*; cf. Snorri Sturluson 2005, 53).

<sup>25</sup> The diacritic *e* of *Ná* is, for typographic reasons, at a certain distance above the *a*. Quadrio may have overlooked it, or he simply ignored it.

<sup>26</sup> As for the 'Runic' text above, I have followed the copy available as pdf in the digital archive of Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense in Milan (see References under Quadrio 1751) with the spelling "mordvargar" on l. 8. Other copies have the variant reading "Mardvargar" on l. 8, probably a misprint, while they retain the form with *o* in the commentary (*VLR*, xxxiv).



53) as “Enn i Huergelme / *Er West*, thni thar”, used by Quadrio on l. 3.

*Grímnismál* (Keyßler 1720, 135, 153): 8,2 “þars en gullbiarta” (l. 11); 36,3 “Skeggiolld ok *Skogul*” (l. 12); 36,7 “*Ranngrid* ok *Radgrid*” (l. 2, with addition of final *a*).

*Hákonarmál* (Keyßler 1720, 119): 20,2 “*A yta Siot*” (ll. 5, 6); 20,4 “*Aþur iafna goþur*” (l. 3, with *p* for *þ*); 20,6 “*Kongs Maþur komi*” (ll. 6, 7, with *p* for *þ*).

Other words are derived from prose quotations, like the initial section of chapter 9 of *Ynglinga saga* (Keyßler 1720, 141; cf. Snorri Sturluson 2002, 22), where Quadrio found the words “*Godheim*” (l. 12), “*Sviom*” (l. 7), “*sumon*” (l. 9). A few elements, which are meant to be recognisable for the reader, are obviously Quadrio’s own initiative, like the name “*Pedsol*” (l. 1) at the beginning of the poem, and the words “*Arbisck*, *Turkstan*, *Persimne*” (l. 6), meant as fake foreign forms corresponding to “*Arabi*, *Turchi*, e *Persi*” in the Italian translation. Some rhyming words, such as “*thullù*” (l. 8), “*lullu*” (l. 9), may simply have been created in order to stick to the rhyme scheme.

In *Della storia e della ragione d’ogni poesia*, Keyßler is only mentioned in the final volume (Quadrio 1752, 232; in no connection with Nordic literature), in the additions to the second part of volume III, which had been published in 1744, so it is possible that the work came to his knowledge only after this date. Undoubtedly, this is Quadrio’s main source for the composition of *VLR*, even though his name is not given any special prominence.

#### 4. THE COMMENTARY

In the commentary on the text, Quadrio combines information derived from various sources with details of his own invention to create a network of historical, literary, and cultural references around the text.

As mentioned above, Quadrio’s knowledge of Old Norse literature can be traced back to his studies on the history of universal literature. As a matter of fact, in the commentary on the ‘Runic’ text, he sometimes reuses his own work, presenting similar facts with very similar formulations. For example, when introducing the fictional poet, Quadrio explains that “*Skogon Hnufa* poetava circa l’anno 930. dell’Era Volgare: ed era Consigliere d’Heroldo Rè

di Norvegia, che un gran numero di Adelruni, o Scaldi, cioè di Poeti aveva al suo Consiglio aggregati” (VLR, xxxii).<sup>27</sup> In this passage, the author combines data already presented in a short list of ancient Nordic poets contained in the first book of volume II of *Della storia e della ragione d’ogni poesia*. Some words and expressions are repeated literally:

Sono pure celebrati nelle storie Runiche, come poeti, ch’essi chiamavano talvolta *Adelruni*, ma volgarmente *Scaldi* [...].  
ARALDO stesso, o EROLDO Re di Norvegia, poetava circa il 930 ed essendo sommamente amator de’ Poeti, ne aveva un buon numero al suo Consiglio aggregati, i nomi de’ quali erano THORBIORNO HORNKLOFE, HOLVERO HNUFA (Quadrio 1741, 32-33).<sup>28</sup>

In inventing his ‘new’ poet, Quadrio uses the nickname of the ninth-century Norwegian skald Ólfr hnúfa (‘Snub-nose’; cf. Clunies Ross 2012, 125) and retains some information on king Haraldr hárfagri (c. 850-c. 932). The form “Skogon” might be based on a somewhat similar name, like “Skogul” (cf. VLR, l. 12), remodelled on names like “Thoron” (VLR, xxxiii), one of the occurring variants for the god Thor.

Among Quadrio’s easily traceable sources is Henry Spelman’s *Glossarium archaiologicum* (*Archaeological Glossary*), first published between 1626 and 1664, which he explicitly quotes about the etymology of the word ‘rune’: “dal Sassonico *Ryne*, che *Misterio* significa, perchè in essa [Lingua] scrivevano i Poeti di quelle Nazioni le lor Profezie, ed Oracoli. Veggasi Enrico Spelman nel *Glossario Archeologico*” (VLR, xxxii).<sup>29</sup> At the voice “*Runicæ literæ*”, Spelman derives this word “à *ryne*, aliàs *zerÿne*, Saxonico, quod *mysterium & rem occultam significat*” (1687, 493).<sup>30</sup>

However, as for the ‘Runic’ text, Quadrio derives most of the material he uses in his commentary from Keyßler’s work. The latter’s name occurs soon after the above-mentioned reference to the *Eddas*, when the author explains that, after finding these fragmentary ‘Runic’ verses (“un semplice rottame d’un vaticinio”; VLR, xxxii),<sup>31</sup> he examined Resen’s edition in the

<sup>27</sup> “Skogon Hnufa composed his poems around 930 of our era and he was councillor to Haraldr, king of Norway, who had included a large number of *Adelruni*, i.e., poets, in his council.”

<sup>28</sup> “[The following names] are also celebrated in Runic stories as poets, whom they sometimes called *adelruni*, but commonly ‘skalds’ [...]. / Haraldr himself, king of Norway, composed his poems around 930 and, since he loved poets very much, he had included a considerable number of them in his council. Their names were Þorbjörn hornklofi, Ólfr hnúfa.”

<sup>29</sup> “From Saxon *ryne*, which means ‘mystery’, because the poets of those nations used that [language] to write their prophecies and oracles. See Henry Spelman in *Glossarium archaiologicum*.”

<sup>30</sup> “From Saxon *ryne*, or *zerÿne*, which means ‘mystery’ or ‘secret thing’.”

<sup>31</sup> “Simply a fragment of a prophecy.”

hope of finding the missing part of the text, but his efforts were in vain. This is why he concludes: “Perciò bene osservarono il Bartolini, il Rudbeck, il Keysler, ed altri, la mentovata Edizione Reinesiana [*sic*] esser molto mancante; e potersene quindi fare una più copiosa d’assai, e migliore a centinaia di migliaia di volte” (*VLR*, xxxii).<sup>32</sup> Reading this, we have the impression that the editor is a fully informed, learned scholar, but in fact Quadrio derives both the information on the *Eddas* and the judgement about Resen’s edition from the passage in which Keyßler introduces these texts:

Edda [...] [d]uabus partibus absolvitur, quarum una Eddam Sæmundi Frode antiquissimam sistit in eaque 1) *Voluspam*, i.e. vaticinia, 2) *Haavamaal* sive præcepta Ethica, cujus Autor ipse Odinus, Deus a majoribus nostris cultus, perperam creditur. 3) *Runa Capitule* h.e. Scientiam vel magiam Odini. [...] Altera Reseniani operis pars absolvit recentiore *Snorronis* Eddam, veterum fabulas ac Mythologiam explicantem. [...] Perquam mancae tamen hæ Eddæ Resenianæ, quod ex lectione Scriptorum Bartholini, Peringskioldi, Rudbeckii aliorumque patet, quare optandum, ut harum Antiquitatum peritus quispiam novam editionem majori cura & ex melioribus Codicibus MStis adornaret (Keyßler 1720, 19-20).<sup>33</sup>

From this same passage Quadrio also derives the translation of the title *Völuspá*: “*Voluspa*, cioè *Vaticinii*” (*VLR*, xxxii),<sup>34</sup> which probably gave him the inspiration for making the Italian text sound like a prophecy.

A topic Quadrio dedicates quite some space to is the god Thor. Ser Ghirigoro, the presumed author of the Italian version, is said to have translated another work from Old Norse, a treatise on the god Thor and his hammer: “Di questo Scrittore abbiamo ancora il Volgarizzamento del *Trattato sul Martello di Thoron*, composto in Lingua di Norvegia da Regnero Lodbrock, Letterato [...] che fioriva intorno all’anno 940” (*VLR*, xxxiii).<sup>35</sup> The mention of Ragnarr loðbrók as a poet echoes once again Quadrio’s own words in the

<sup>32</sup> “Therefore, Bartholin, Rudbeck, Keyßler, and others were right when they observed that Resen’s mentioned edition is very deficient, and one could certainly make a much larger and a thousand times better one.”

<sup>33</sup> “The *Edda* [...] consists of two parts. The first one is the ancient *Edda* by Sæmundr fróði, including: 1) *Völuspá*, i.e., prophecies, 2) *Hávamál* or moral precepts, mistakenly attributed to Odin himself, a god worshipped by our forefathers, 3) *Chapters on the Runes*, i.e., Odin’s science or magic. [...] The second part of Resen’s work consists of the more recent *Edda* by Snorri, which explains the tales and mythology of the ancient people. [...] However, these *Eddas* by Resen are very deficient, as one can read in Bartholin, Peringskiöld, Rudbeck, and others. Therefore, it is desirable that an expert of these antiquities will prepare a new, more precise edition, based on better manuscripts.”

<sup>34</sup> “*Völuspá*, i.e., *Prophecies*.”

<sup>35</sup> “By this writer, we also have a translation of the *Treatise on Thor’s Hammer*, written, in the language of Norway, by the author Ragnarr loðbrók [...] who flourished around the year 940.”

above-mentioned list of ancient Nordic poets: “REGNERO LODBROC fioriva verso il 940” (Quadrio 1741, 33).<sup>36</sup>

This treatise on Thor’s hammer is said to consist of three chapters, dealing, respectively, with the god Thor and his cult; with his hammer, here called “Miolnar”; and with representations of the hammer in carvings (VLR, xxxiii). The details mentioned in this context undoubtedly reveal that Quadrio is again using Keyßler as his source of information, picking up elements and nouns that he reassembles for his own purpose. From the discussion of a rejected Germanic origin of Hercules, Quadrio derives that Thor “male fu confuso da alcuni con *Ercole Magusano*, con *Ercole Sassano*, con *Odino*”<sup>37</sup> (cf. Keyßler 1720, 190-96, on “Hercules Saxanus”; 198-200, on “Hercules Magusanus”; 201-02, on the confusion with Odin), as well as the parallelism with Celtic mythology: “il culto lui dato da Celti, da’ quali era detto *Taran*, o *Taram*”<sup>38</sup> (cf. Keyßler 1720, 196: “*Thor Celtis est Taran vel Taram*”).<sup>39</sup> He also finds a mention of Thor’s “Duelli con *Hrugnero*”<sup>40</sup> (cf. Keyßler 1720, 196: “*Monomachia Thori & Hrugneris*”), with a summary of the episode on Thor and Hrungrnir from Snorri’s *Edda*. In this passage, Keyßler inserts a remark on Thor’s hammer, whose very title “*De Malleo Thoronis*” (196) is echoed by Quadrio’s own title. Quadrio retains Keyßler’s Latin word “clava” (196): “Clava, o sia Martello”,<sup>41</sup> as well as the wrong version of the name Mjöllnir: “il qual Martello era chiamato con proprio nome *Miolnar*”<sup>42</sup> (cf. Keyßler 1720, 196: “sua propria voce dicebatur *Miolnar*”),<sup>43</sup> and the description of the hammer as frightening and damaging, “spaventevole, e infesto” (cf. Keyßler 1720, 196: “infestus ac timendus”, in reversed order). Finally, he also finds here the notion that Thor’s hammer and the Christian cross were similar, and sometimes misinterpreted, in carvings: “alcuni Antiquarj [...] hanno così fatto Martello preso per una Croce, dalla cui figura non era molto dissomigliante; e quindi hanno riputato esser de’ Cristiani que’ Monumenti con esso segnati, ch’erano de’ Gentili”<sup>44</sup> (cf. Keyßler 1720, 138: “non omnes cruce signatos lapides [...] a Christianis esse erectos. Malleus enim Thoronis Dei crucis figuram referebat”).<sup>45</sup>

Another Nordic god mentioned by Quadrio is Bragi, correctly designed

<sup>36</sup> “Ragnarr loðbrók flourished around 940.”

<sup>37</sup> “[Thor] was mistakenly confused by some people with *Hercules Magusanus*, with *Hercules Saxanus*, with *Odin*.”

<sup>38</sup> “The cult attributed to him by the Celts, who called him *Taran*, or *Taram*.”

<sup>39</sup> “For the Celts, Thor is *Taran* or *Taram*.”

<sup>40</sup> “Duels with Hrungrnir.”

<sup>41</sup> “Club, i.e., hammer.”

<sup>42</sup> “That hammer was called by its own name *Miolnar*.”

<sup>43</sup> “By its own name it was called *Miolnar*.”

<sup>44</sup> “Some antiquarians [...] took such a hammer for a cross, since it was not very different in shape. Therefore, they thought the pagan monuments presenting this symbol to be Christian.”

<sup>45</sup> “Not all stones marked with a cross [...] were erected by Christians. In fact, Thor’s hammer recalled the shape of the cross of God.”

as the god of poetry. Once again, the author derives his information from Keyßler, who describes him as “mansuetum, sapientem, eloquentem, promptum & Poëseos maxime gnarum [...] adeo ut ab ipsius nomine Poëtica *Bragur* dicatur” (Keyßler 1720, 352-53).<sup>46</sup> However, this time, Quadrio combines the details derived from his source with some personal additions totally devoid of any foundation:

da *Brago* il più benefico Nume, che riconoscessero i Settentrionali, chiamavano altresì *Bragonescks* i Poeti, e la Poesia *Bragur*; onde son venuti all'Italia *Bragone*, *Braga*, voci, che i Fiorentini, per adattarle alla gorgia lor propria, pronunziano *Bracone*, *Braca*. Ma il Mondo [...] non va più così. *Bragonesse* cioè *Poettesse*, sono in oggi le Donne: e per ciò è, che portan le brache (VLR, xxxxi).<sup>47</sup>

This passage obviously plays on a mock correspondence between Old Norse and Italian words, establishing false etymologies to enhance a comical effect. In this case, Quadrio starts from the correct meaning of the word *bragur* ‘poetry’. In fact, on the basis of information given by his sources as well as glossaries and Latin translations of Old Norse texts, he did have the opportunity to interpret Old Norse words correctly. But this is not always at the core of his interest, so on other occasions he rather picks up words that happen to be similar to Italian ones and attributes some invented meaning to them. One such case is the comment to “*ranngrida*” (VLR, l. 2), explained as “una cosa sì fatta [...] che *grida misericordia*” (VLR, xxxxi).<sup>48</sup> As seen above, Quadrio adds a final *a* to Old Norse “*Ranngrid*”, ultimately derived from *Grímnismál*, in order to approach it to the Italian verb *grida* ‘it cries’. Something similar happens in another remark on poetry, reported as a comment to Old Norse “*meth*” (VLR, l. 12), actually the preposition *með* ‘with’, on the basis of its assonance with the Italian word *matto* ‘mad’:

L'eruditissimo Anton Maria Salvini, a cui le Muse per immortal beneficio rivelarono tutte le vere origini delle voci, dal Runico *Meth*, che vale *Poeta*, [...] derivava non senza ragione il Greco Matthos (ματθα), e l'Italiano *Matto*: ond'è, che alcuni, che ritengono tuttora del parlar Runico, chiamano i Poeti anche in oggi *Matti* (VLR, xxxiv).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> “Mild, wise, eloquent, prompt, and the most expert at poetry [...] so that the poetic art is called *bragur* from his name.”

<sup>47</sup> “From *Brago*, the most benevolent god that the Nordic people acknowledged, they called poets *bragonescks* and poetry *bragur*; hence came to Italy the words *bragone*, *braga*, which the inhabitants of Florence, in order to adapt them to their own peculiar pronunciation, pronounced *bracone*, *braca* [‘breeches’]. But [...] this is not the way the world goes nowadays. Today, women are *bragonesse*, i.e., poetesses, and this is why they wear breeches.”

<sup>48</sup> “Such a thing [...] that cries for mercy.”

<sup>49</sup> “The very learned Anton Maria Salvini, to whom the Muses, as an eternal favour, revealed

Quadrio's interest in etymology is displayed, on more serious premises, in other works, such as his linguistic writings (Bonfadini 2010, *passim*). In *VLR*, by contrast, the several examples of mock etymology have the appearance of learned investigations, while they actually aim for a sarcastic or comical effect. In the case of “mordvargar” (*VLR*, l. 8; cf. Old Norse *morðvargr* ‘murderer’), the comment establishes a link to the general theme of *Borlanda impasticciata*: “La voce *Mordvargar* può significare benissimo anche *Pasticcio*: onde bene il Pedsol intitolò il suo Componimento *Borlanda Impasticciata*” (*VLR*, xxxiv).<sup>50</sup> Since Quadrio's comment normally disregards the meaning of authentic Old Norse words, invented ones are as good a pretext for his remarks. This is the case of “thullù” (*VLR*, l. 8), which gives the chance of a reference to the Italian literary tradition:

*Thullù* accorciato di *Thurlulù*, in quella guisa, che gl'Italiani *Mattino* accorciano di *Matutino*: e vale in Lingua Runica il medesimo, che *Speculativo*, o *Filosofo*. Il volgarizzatore scrisse *Fisofolo*, come quegli, che nato in Val di Mugello, parlava la Lingua del suo paese. E *Fisofolo* invece di *Filosofo* disse pure il Boccaccio (*Nov. 29.*) (*VLR*, xxxiv).<sup>51</sup>

Some of the passages quoted above show Quadrio's efforts to establish links, improbable as they may be, between the Old Norse world and the Italian culture, mentioning names that would sound familiar to his readers, like Salvini and Boccaccio. We can observe this same strategy in a more articulate episode. The above-mentioned tenth-century Norwegian treatise on Thor's hammer is said to have arrived, along some unknown paths, at a Capuchin convent in Radicofani, Tuscany, where the author was able to read it. The transmission of the ‘Runic’ poem is thus connected to the famous bibliophile Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714), in whose library the codex “CC.4.” (*VLR*, xxxiii) with the poem and its translation was preserved. However, the editor informs his readers that the text now only survives in a transcription provided by a noblewoman, while the manuscript itself was stolen by a petty cleric (“*Chericuzzo*”; *VLR*, xxxiii), who sold it to a certain “*Milord Ktinktinkton, che facendo de' Manoscritti grandissima incetta, com'è*

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all the true origins of words, derived not without reason from Runic *meth*, which means ‘poet’, the Greek word *matthos* (ματθα) and the Italian *matto*: hence to this very day some people, whose language still shows some Runic influence, keep calling poets *matti* [‘mad’].” Anton Maria Salvini (1653-1729) was a professor of Ancient Greek and a collaborator to the *Crusca* dictionary.

<sup>50</sup> “The word *Mordvargar* can perfectly mean ‘pasty’, as well, whence Pedsol deftly chose *Borlanda impasticciata* as the title of his poem.”

<sup>51</sup> “*Thullù*, abbreviated from *Thurlulù*, in the same way as the Italians abbreviate *matutino* to *mattino* [‘morning’]. In the Runic language it means the same as ‘thinker’ or ‘philosopher’. The translator wrote *fisofolo* since, hailing from the Mugello valley, he spoke the language of his region. In fact, *fisofolo* instead of *filosofo* was written by Boccaccio, too (tale 29 [actually 19, in *Decameron*]).”

*uso di tutti gl'Ingleſi, lo ſi ha trasportato nel ſuo paefe in Manchester*" (VLR, xxxiii).<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the earlier arrival of this codex to Italy is linked to some famous names of fifteenth-century Italian literature in that we read that its story is recorded in a letter addressed to the poet Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), who explains:

facendo il celebre Lorenzo de' Medici ſtudioſa ricerca di Opere, e Libri d'ogni Lingua, per formare quella illuſtre ſua Libreria, fu-  
rongli detti verſi dalla Lapponia inviati, con alcune altre coſuzze,  
da un certo viaggiatore Bartolommeo de li Sonetti, di cui fa pur  
menzione il Quadrio nella Storia, e Ragione d'ogni Poesia Tom.  
VI. pag. 49, e che il prefato Lorenzo per miglior ſua intelligenza  
ne fece pur fare la verſione da Ghirigoro di Val Mugello (VLR,  
xxxii-xxxiii).<sup>53</sup>

In this passage, Quadrio even includes a reference to his own work (1749, 48-49), in which he mentions a scarcely known fifteenth-century poet, Bartolomeo da li Sonetti, who described in a cycle of tailed sonnets the islands of the Aegean Sea, but whose voyages certainly did not take him as far as the Nordic countries.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As the analysed passages have shown, Quadrio makes a very free use of his sources, whose scientific value does not interest him in this context. While he often combines authentic information with invented details, one of his recurrent strategies is to establish connections between the Old Norse world and the Italian culture across time and space, thus embedding new material into a well-known tradition, which his readers feel part of.

As a whole, the text gives the impression of a very learned piece of writing, as shown by the rich information offered in the commentary and by the careful metric construction of the poem. The intent is to parody the habits and style of contemporary learning. Exploiting his humorous vein, Quadrio often obtains a comical effect, which sometimes becomes satirical. In doing

<sup>52</sup> "Milord Ktinkinton, who, following the habit of all Englishmen, used to buy up huge amounts of manuscripts, took it to his country, in Manchester."

<sup>53</sup> "When the famous Lorenzo de' Medici learnedly went in search of works and books in every language in order to collect his illustrious library, these verses were sent to him from Lapland, together with some other smaller things, by a certain traveller, Bartolomeo da li Sonetti, who is also mentioned by Quadrio in his *Storia e ragione d'ogni poesia*, book VI, page 49. To better understand it, the said Lorenzo had it translated by Ghirigoro di Val Mugello." The reference is obviously to the Laurentian Library (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana), to whose collections the Lord of Florence Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-92), known as the Magnificent, contributed extensively.

this, he does not forget himself, making reference to his own *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia*, an ironic self-representation that would certainly amuse his readers and friends in the Academy (Arato 2002, 156-57; Rinaldi 2010, 119). However, his aim is certainly not to express criticism of this learned literature, which he himself is an exponent of, but to contribute to the collective entertainment in the jesting tone typical of the whole *Borlanda impasticciata*.

The references to Old Norse literature and culture, as well as the use of some samples of the language, are only a pretext, but they do add an especially exotic taste, which certainly was far more unusual than most of the other languages found in the book. In fact, in *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia*, Quadrio regards the Nordic peoples as the remotest inhabitants of the world: “Questi stessi [Bardi] fiorivano pure presso i Norvegi, presso i Dani, e presso gl’Islandi, per modo che luogo sì remoto non ci ha avuto nel Mondo, dove la Poesia non si sia fatta vedere per illustrarlo” (Quadrio 1741, 31).<sup>54</sup> This exotic effect would not have been possible without Quadrio’s expertise in this field, which was definitely rare, if not unsurpassed, among his contemporaries. Although his universal history is a far more significant step in the dissemination of Nordic literature in Italy, his ‘Runic’ verses still give us the chance to appreciate both his erudition and his wit.

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<sup>54</sup> “Those same [bards] also flourished among the Norwegians, the Danes, and the Icelanders, so much so that there has never been a place on earth, remote as it may be, where poetry has not shown itself to give it lustre.”



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