How to Reconquer *Poiesis*? Florian's *Gonzalve de Cordoue ou Grenade Reconquise* (1791)

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The newly drawn tree of knowledge in D'Alembert and Diderot's *Encyclopédie raisonnée des sciences, des arts et des techniques* (1751-1772) divided human understanding into three realms, Memory, Reason, and Imagination, leading to three branches of knowledge, History, Philosophy, and Poetry respectively. Inspired by Francis Bacon, the tree encompassed and attempted to classify all fields in a systematic, logical manner. The most radical intervention in the encyclopedic enterprise was to position theology as a scientific subcategory of philosophy, shifting the weight of inquiry away from God and toward a science of man—a re-ordering illustrated in Cochin's celebrated allegorical frontispiece of the quest for Truth unveiled. This mapping of knowledge helped visualize *l'enchaînement* (the interconnectedness) of the various fields of thought, which individual articles sought to demonstrate. But an obvious though seldom-noted fact is how off balance the tree really is, with a very thin and light poetry branch compared to the lengthy and heavy branches of philosophy and history. Hence the question, could it be that the philosophes meant to displace not only God but poetry as well? Not only the divinity but the *vates*? The diminished importance of poetry within the tree of knowledge contrasts with the pervasive presence of poetry in the eighteenth century, not only as an aesthetic category but also as a widespread social practice—both an aspiration for men and women of letters and a social link connecting the educated who enjoyed hearing and composing verses on all occasions.

This question of the articulation between the Enlightenment and *poiesis* remains a fruitful but under-researched domain of inquiry. As it ushered in a new world of knowledge and values, the French Enlightenment debated the definition, role, place and "sacredness" of poetry, but this questioning has seldom been an object of study. The first reason for this lack is that we tend to emphasize the philosophes' analytical, critical enterprise and the plays and fictions born of their imagination as a better match to the modern spirit of the Enlightenment than the (admittedly) flawed, poetic experiments beholden to neo-classicism.[1] Secondly, Romanticism effectively devalued non-lyrical poetry, therefore condemning the vast majority of verses (epic, didactic, biblical, descriptive, pastoral, satirical, etc.) written during the French Enlightenment regardless of their eclecticism and poetic ambition. Yet the poetic production of the French Enlightenment, far from the desert to which it is almost always compared,[2] raises, in fine, doubts similar to those broached in the (prose) philosophical writings of the period, for instance in the domains of gender, nature, and power. Epic poetry suggested nostalgia for a virile, epic world of action in contradistinction to the world of thought and conversation confining men to their cabinets and to salons within a feminizing culture. Pastoral poetry harked back to a utopian world where nature engendered innocence, unlike the corrupting influence of hypersocialized, urban settings. And a nascent poetry in prose sought liberty

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and equality of genres, thereby condemning aesthetic as much as political absolutism.

This essay focuses on the epic poem in prose, *Gonzalve de Cordoue ou Grenade reconquise* (1791) by Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian (1755-1794) as emblematic of the struggle to define poetry independently from versification during the French Enlightenment. The composition and reception of *Gonzalve de Cordoue* reflected the Enlightenment's ambivalent perspective on poetry: in a review of the book for the *Mercure français* (January 1792), the influential critic Jean-François de la Harpe ruled that *poiesis* could not exist without versification. Prose being a "mere language" and not art, composing fiction in prose involved no creative process. La Harpe, a fellow academician, became Florian's most vocal critic: his sharp worded condemnation of *Gonzalve de Cordoue* in *Le Mercure* was later reprinted in his influential *Lycée, ou Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne* (1822). La Harpe's insurmountable aversion for a genre considered too easy, "ce genre faux et radicalement vicieux" (this false and radically flawed genre), namely poetic prose and poems in prose, strongly echoes early detractors of the phenomenon, most clearly the abbé Fraguier and Voltaire (La Harpe, *Lycée* 287). In 1719 the French academician l'abbé Fraguier presented a discourse, "Qu'il ne peut y avoir de poëmes en prose," a view later endorsed by Voltaire who condemned the genre-bending, "powerless/impotent" poets in prose.[3] I have shown elsewhere how the purist poetics of Fraguier and Voltaire were on a par with a conservative socio-political defense of established prerogatives of rank, and that aversion for prose extending its domain to poetry actually reflected dislike and concern vis-à-vis the expansion and ambition of the "vulgaire profane," the common people, and its looming consequences—aesthetically, the popularization of taste; politically, taking over power.[4] This helps explain the rhetoric of monstrosity used to dismiss literary hybrids such as prose poems; however, such rhetoric ran counter to modern taste. By the end of the eighteenth century, the social conditions under which men and women of letters wrote and their obsession with the *sine qua non* condition of versification had translated into quasi mechanical, predictable rhyming exercises lacking originality, fire and *naturel* for the most part, thus becoming a "poésie de salon" greatly popular both in the high genres and the numerous smaller genres, but frustratingly devoid of greatness. Though contrary to the professed respect for the hierarchy and separation between genres gradually established in the seventeenth century (epic poetry and tragedy at the summit; below, pastorals, elegies, odes, satires; and in the lower walks of poetry, sonnets, epigrams, ballads, madrigals, etc.),[5] hybridization became one of the solutions to rejuvenate established categories.

His success long forgotten, Florian, is barely known today aside perhaps from three mementos: the famous octosyllable line "Pour vivre heureux vivons caché" (To live happy, let us live hidden); the popular song *Plaisirs d'amour*; and his *Fables* (1792) picturing a diverse eighteenth-century society—a satire of the ancien régime in particular and human vices in general, with a sympathetic view for the people.[6] Though a few nineteenth-century artists appreciated his writing—e.g. Chateaubriand, Donizetti, Théophile Gautier, Stendhal—Florian faced mostly negative judgments then and now: time and again, critics dismiss his fictions as sentimental, artificial and monotonous.[7] Though all concur about the "grace" and elegance of his writing, they deplore its lack of

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depth and verisimilitude: its grace has withered and fallen out of fashion.[8] Prefaces to Florian's work tend to begin with the admission that the author lacked the genius to be remembered as a big name in literary history.[9] I argue, however, that Florian's poetics reveals an ambitious and insightful poetic memorialist who grappled with France's contemporary historical and socio-political upheaval.

"Tous les genres sont bons, hors le genre ennuyeux" (All genres are good, except the boring genre): the quotation from Voltaire borrowed by Florian to open his own volume of plays could actually serve as epigraph to introduce the diversity of his complete works. In his acclaimed fables, inspired by La Fontaine and Tomás de Iriarte, lively and cutting verses wield a political and moral weapon. For the theater, Florian wrote ingenious *arlequinades* performed by Italian comedians as a facetious counterpoint to high tragedy and comedy, in the spirit of Marivaux.[10] His twelve novellas (still awaiting serious critical appraisal) offer unusual examples of cultural anthropology *avant la lettre*.[11] The most criticized part of his production consists of his five ambitious prose fictions. Two are pastorals: *Galatée* (1783) in imitation of Cervantes, and *Estelle et Némorin* (1788), set in Languedoc on the banks of the Gardon river, reminiscent of the Lignon river in Honoré d'Urfé *L'Astrée*. The other three are historical epic poems in prose: *Numa Pompilius, second roi de Rome* (1786), *Gonzalve de Cordoue ou Grenade reconquise* (1791) and *Guillaume Tell ou la Suisse libre* (1802), the latter written while Florian was imprisoned during the Terror, at what turned out to be the end of his life. For a vigorous criticism against the many perceived faults of these works (to be understood in the French context of a crisis of genres pitching prose against verse, as I will show), one can turn to nineteenth-century critics Sainte Beuve and Arsène Houssaye,[12] who echo earlier detractors who found "poëmes en prose" to be a controversial, hybrid mode of writing that confused and confounded many throughout the eighteenth century. A typical, terminological slippage around the word *poëme* occurs in the opening of a 1792 review of *Gonzalve de Cordoue*:

> Le nom de Florian suffit pour inspirer un préjugé favorable en faveur de ce poëme: car quoique l'auteur n'ait pas osé lui donné ce titre, parce qu'il est écrit en prose, l'ordonnance & le ton de l'ouvrage ne permettent pas de l'appeler un roman, en convenant cependant, à proprement parler, qu'il n'y a de poëmes que les ouvrages en vers. (Saint-Ange, "Gonzalve" 119)[13]
>
> (The name of Florian is enough to inspire a favorable opinion toward this poem: for though the author did not dare give it this title, because it is written in prose, the composition and tone of the work does not allow to call it a novel, while we agree however that, strictly speaking, poems can only be works in verse.)

Florian's "poëmes en prose," written in a pastoral or epic vein, won popular but not critical acclaim and thus remained marginalized. The wide yet ambivalent appeal of Florian's work extended to the court, but it also signals the rising power of that modern literary engine, the reading public.[14] Even now it is difficult to appreciate an author whose popular success contrasts with the perceived lack of grandeur and epic elevation demanded by his times (and the rules) and with our own requirement of sublimity and originality.[15] Florian summarized the discrepancy between the negative critical reception of "poëmes en prose" and their popular success, clearly inscribing his own work in a

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genealogy:

> Il [*Gonzalve*] a essuyé beaucoup de critiques, comme tout ouvrage de ce genre en essuiera toujours. Depuis *Télémaque* [de Fénelon] jusqu'à *Gonzalve*, aucun poème en prose n'a réussi sur-le-champ. On commence toujours par dire que *c'est mauvais*, et *Télémaque* a cent éditions, *La Mort d'Abel* [de Gessner] en a cinquante, *Bélisaire* fait le principal titre de Marmontel, *Numa* est à sa sixième édition. J'ai dans ma bibliothèque sept traductions en sept langues que je n'entends pas. (*Mémoires et correspondance* 40)[16]
>
> (It [*Gonzalve*] has suffered lots of criticism, as any work of this kind will always suffer. From *Télémaque* [by Fénelon] until *Gonzalve*, no poem in prose has succeeded right away. One always starts by saying *it is bad,* yet *Télémaque* has one hundred editions, *La Mort d'Abel* [by Gessner] fifty, *Belisaire* is Marmontel's principal title and *Numa* [by Florian himself] is in its sixth print run. I count in my library seven translations in seven languages I do not understand.)

Throughout the eighteenth century, Fénelon's poetical sequel in prose to Homer's *Odyssey—Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699)—engendered experimental imitations, "poëmes en prose," which many critics considered "monstrosities" outside the bounds of traditional poetry codified by Boileau in his acclaimed *Art poétique* (1673) and upheld by Voltaire, whose formidable authority ensured the lasting appeal of neo-classical hierarchies.[17] Simply put, Florian, like his fellow prose poets, respected the classification of Boileau, "the literary dictator of Europe" (Clark ix)' yet undertook to open new possibilities by substituting elevated prose diction for verse in the hope of reconquering a poetry in crisis. Interestingly, the reconquest of poetic enthusiasm by poets in prose did not seek the triumph of one genre over the other, a predestined poetic supremacy. Instead, writers engaged in a complex, deliberate mingling of epic, lyric and pastoral. Many authors, Florian in particular but also Chateaubriand later on, often referred to the symbolic musical contest between the poet's dual instruments, his pastoral flute or his lyre vs. his epic trumpet. When accused of lacking in epic heights, Florian justified himself with the example of Cervantes, whose pastoral *Galatée* included battles and duels, "tributes," Florian wrote, "paid by Cervantes to his nation." Florian specifically explained how, when composing his own *Galatée*, he wanted to dress Cervantes's *Galatée* with the cloak of Solomon Gessner's pastoral shepherdess.[18] The Swiss German Gessner, "le maître de tous les bergers" (the master of all shepherds), wrote hugely popular prose idylls that encouraged numerous experiments in prose poetry.[19] Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, and to a lesser extent Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* offered important models to escape the strictly bound, hierarchical field of French letters that shunned "le mélange des genres" (mixing genres) as bad taste.

"Florianiser" French letters

The highly codified nature of French versification made the task of producing modern epic poetry worthy of the classics particularly onerous. Therefore some authors chose not to conquer this difficulty but rather to circumvent it by writing elevated fictions in prose.[20] The success and accessibility of novels pressured many writers to provide similar entertaining readability without losing nobility or their moral, philosophical or historical

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message. As already mentioned, at the onset of the century, Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* marked the beginning of the vogue to ennoble prose with poetic diction and worthy subject matters, and it remained on the horizon as the most accomplished model to emulate. Florian's character Numa Pompilius for instance, was compared to a "Roman Telemachus" (Gourdin 195). What were the stylistic codes that made prose poems like Florian's recognizable? Rejuvenating epic poetry with prose meant integrating readily identifiable tropes: an opening invocation,[21] apostrophes,[22] epic similes,[23] superlatives and generic epithets, often in anteposition ("la noble et pieuse Isabelle," "le féroce Boabdil"), embedded narratives, echoes of ancient or modern classics (such as Corneille's *Le Cid* in *Gonzalve de Cordoue*), tempest and battle scenes, to cite a few. The syncopated rhythm characteristic of parataxis or "style coupé," meant to evoke an oral mode of delivery, recurs constantly. Repetition of the adverb *déjà* (already) accelerates and condenses the time of the narration, a characteristic of poetic enunciation vs. the more realistic time of novels (Florian, *Gonzalve* 1, 183-84). Variations on Virgil's *locus amoenus*, famously echoed by Fénelon in his acclaimed description of Calypso's island at the opening of *Télémaque*, occur in all prose poems. *Gonzalve de Cordoue* celebrates Granada's country slopes as "lieux de délice"—a literal translation of *locus amoenus*.[24] The proximity with Fenelonian poetics, which fuses classical diction with baroque motifs, is striking in Florian's description of the Alhambra: the realm of the senses dominates, with perfumes, sights and sounds emanating from a natural luxuriance, with emphasis placed on creative waterworks, symbolic of the harmony between art and nature:

> Là, des milliers de colonnes d'albâtre soutiennent des voûtes immenses, dont les murs, couverts de porphyre, éclatent d'or et d'azur. Là, des eaux vives et jaillissantes forment, au milieu des appartemens, des cascades d'argent liquide, vont remplir des canaux de jaspe, et serpentent dans les galeries. Partout le doux parfum des fleurs se mêle à celui des aromates, qui, brûlant toujours dans les souterrains, s'exhalent au pied des colonnes et viennent embaumer l'air qu'on respire. Des jours ménagés sur la ville, sur les bords enchantés des deux fleuves, sur les montagnes de neige, présentent à l'œil étonné des tableaux variés sans cesse. Tout ce qui flatte les sens, tout ce que l'art et la nature, la magnificence et le goût, peuvent réunir pour la volupté, se trouve joint dans ce beau séjour aux chefs-d'œuvre qui charment l'esprit. (ibid 215-16)
>
> (There, thousands of alabaster columns support immense vaults, their walls covered in porphyry, bursting with gold and azure. There, gushing spring waters create, in the midst of apartments, cascades of silver liquid, then fill canals made of jasper and meander through galleries. Everywhere the sweet perfume of flowers mingles with the scent of spices constantly burning in underground passages, exhaling their fragrance at the foot of columns and perfuming the air one breathes. Vistas framing the city, the enchanted banks of both rivers, and snow peaked mountains, offer to the astonished eyes endlessly varied tableaux. Everything that flatters the senses, everything that art and nature, magnificence and taste, can unite for the sake of voluptuousness, conjoins in this beautiful sojourn with masterpieces that charm the mind.)

The play between water and light also dominates Florian's picture of the Alhambra's

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renowned gardens, framed with deictic phrases similar to Fénelon's: "*Tantôt* une cascade bruyante se précipite du haut d'un rocher; *tantôt* un ruisseau tranquille sort en murmurant d'une touffe de roses. *Là* c'est une grotte écartée où filtrent plusieurs sources d'eau vive; *ici* c'est un bocage sombre où voltigent mille rossignols" (ibid 217-18) (*Sometimes* a loud cascade rushes down from the summit of a rock; *sometimes* a tranquil river emerges babbling from a rose bush. *There*, several sources of spring water seeps through a remote cave; *here*, a thousand nightingales flutter in a dark grove) (emphasis added).
Verses inscribed on the Alhambra's architecture confirm the highly poetic nature of the magnificent space (ibid 216-17).

Florian's flowery style gave birth to a neologism, *florianiser*, namely to deck with flowers, to poeticize.[25] We should note how the choice to poeticize prose, as opposed to prosify poetry, was the only one in keeping with the classical injunction to imitate a beautiful nature. *Mimesis*, therefore, remained the driving impulse behind eighteenth-century prose poems, which had to shun prosaisms to win the challenge of elevating prose without falling into the novel. Florian extended this principle to his translation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, removing any perceived overly prosaic or comic indelicacies, in effect taming the original.[26]

I have indicated so far the manner in which Florian's works participated in a general movement that began at the dawn of the century to write poetic fictions in order to escape the sclerosis of poetry in verse while avoiding the label *novel*. But Florian also stands out from the fifty or so authors of prose poems during the eighteenth century when we pay attention to four personal constants in his work. First, his prose poems are prefaced by unusually strong paratexts: unlike the customary legitimizing discourses that justify poetic narratives in prose, Florian appends well-researched literary theory and history, such as his essay on the pastoral and his "Précis historique sur les Maures d'Espagne," prefacing respectively *Galatée* and *Gonzalve de Cordoue.* Second, Florian refreshes the clichéd mythical Arcadia by substituting Occitania as the site of golden age abundance. It is still a highly constructed world of idyllic idleness and cleanliness, of dreamy, educated shepherds reciting poetic romances, artificial in many ways if it were not for the actual recollection of the mild climate, picturesque landscape, fertile soil, and rural mores of southern France where Florian spent a happy, carefree childhood. A third, even more striking and original element relates to cultural linguistics—Florian's revival of "romances." He acknowledged and praised the *Romancero general* anthology (1600-1605) as an important source for *Gonzalve de Cordoue* and the history of the Moors that precedes it, to which I will return. In an earlier pastoral work, *Estelle*, Florian included a celebrated romance on Clémence Isaure, singing the generosity of this lover of poetry who inaugurated poetry contests in Toulouse. Such was the appeal of the romances Florian inserted into his prose narratives that they were all set to music. But *Estelle* also contains a romance in Occitan, "très tôt reconnue comme la première œuvre de notre histoire imprimée en cette langue. … Au XIX siècle les félibres et les cigaliers se sont emparés de ces vers. Ils en ont bientôt fait l'un des textes fondateurs du renouveau des cultures méridionales" (Gourdin 205) (very soon acknowledged as the first work of our printed history in this language. … In the nineteenth century, Provencal authors and poets appropriated these verses. They quickly made them one of the founding texts for the renewal of southern cultures). Florian's care to preserve a cultural and linguistic regional

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tradition actually went against the grain of the times when a politics of national unity was soon to translate into a linguistic politics demanding that the French language ultimately displace all patois.[27] Thus Florian's linguistic and literary allegiance to his region set him apart culturally as well as politically.

Another characteristic that distinguishes Florian from his contemporaries is his Spanish orientation, an unusual affinity within a Europe where all eyes had turned to its northern countries, apples now falling in Newton's orchard, no longer Spain and even less Italy. Florian's correspondence and his work attest to his extensive research on Spanish history and reveal an important but so far unnoted connection with the Spanish scholar and poet Juan Pablo Forner (1756-1797) to whom he turned for access to sources and for advice: in the endnotes of the "Précis historique sur l'histoire des Maures," Florian pays homage to Forner's help in sending source manuscripts and insightful counsel.[28] The intellectual tie between Forner and Florian is noteworthy in light of Florian's other favorite Spanish author, Iriarte—Forner's arch enemy. Space does not allow here a more thorough investigation of this triangle Florian/Forner/Iriarte to shed light on the transcultural and literary exchanges between France and Spain during the Enlightenment. But it is worth recalling here first the well-documented anglomania that was sweeping France at the time, and second, the simultaneous Spanish context of protest against gallomania. Very briefly stated, while eighteenth-century France sought the freedom and success (in form and content) of British works, Spain was fighting a battle against the perceived corruption of Castilian by Gallicisms. In this quarrel, Florian actually stood on the side of the Spanish language as becomes clear in his choice of the most vocal critics Forner and Iriarte as favorite sources.

In addition to fables imitated from Iriarte, and *Galatée* imitated from Cervantes, Florian's admiration culminated in his translation of *Don Quixote*, which he thus justified: "J'espère raccommoder Cervantes avec beaucoup de gens d'esprit qui n'ont pourtant pas celui d'admirer ce grand genie" (*Mémoires et correspondance*, 511-1[2]). (I hope to reconcile Cervantes with many educated minds who nevertheless lack the education to admire this great genius)—a bold suggestion of where his contemporaries ought to look to find a modern genius. In lieu of a more exhaustive, comparative study, I will leave it here to Sébastien Mercier to condense a vast program of study when, his finger on the pulse of his era, he invented the neologism *espagnoliser* with the following illustrative sentence: "Florian a fait tout ce qu'il a pu pour nous Espagnoliser; mais dans tout ce qu'il a traduit ou imité, nous aurons grand'peine à nous désanglomaniser en fait de romans" (235). (Florian did all he could to Spainify us; but in all that he translated or imitated, we will have a difficult time de-anglomanizing ourselves when it comes to novels.)

The success of Florian's poetic works in prose shows the lasting, albeit controversial, appeal of the new genre for authors and readers keen on experimenting with the freedom of prose to compose, in lieu of novels (still lacking legitimacy and a national tradition), narratives equal in style and subject matter to poetry.[29] If Florian's *Gonzalve de Cordoue* fit within the more general poetic struggle that I have sketched above, original features—its revolutionary context and its Spanish sources—encourage a revised reading of the text as experimenting with poetics to write history. After some biographical remarks, I will turn in the next section to Florian's recently published correspondence to offer a new and intriguing interpretative window onto *Gonzalve de Cordoue*. Florian wrote this love story

between the Castilian Gonzalve and a Nasrid woman, Zuléma, precisely in the midst of the revolutionary events of 1789-1791. I propose that the conflicted aesthetics of Florian's "poëme en prose," his representation of Granada's siege and the Abencerages' tragic fate, the nostalgia for a paradise lost to decadence and internal rivalries, represent an attempt to address the political turmoil, forces, and complexities of a revolution in the making, similar in its epic scale and violence to the turning point of Granada's reconquest.

Linked to the representation of epic events, a central question raised by the text, which I examine in the final section, is the relationship between *poiesis* and a certain "literary" writing of history, notably Pérez de Hita de Ginès's 1595 *Guerras Civiles de Granada*, which Florian emulated by incorporating romances in verse. While typical of the French Enlightenment's ambition to modernize the epic, *Gonzalve de Cordoue* stands out by its source of inspiration and subject matter. Contrary to his contemporaries who turned toward British literature, Florian celebrated Spanish chivalric history and culture; he admired, imitated and eventually translated Cervantes; he researched extensively Granada's Moorish past and prefaced his epic *Gonzalve de Cordoue* with a detailed "Précis historique sur les Maures d'Espagne" that became a reference in France and a vogue in Spain.

Florian or the self-fashioning of a Spanish "homme des Lumières"

Florian's biography reveals an unusual example of creative self-fashioning and social positioning, which helps us understand better the whole era. Indeed, whereas biographers and critics have drawn a rather pale and meek figure, Florian himself penned a fictionalized autobiography, his *Mémoires d'un jeune espagnol*, published posthumously. Florian "Spainified" his origins and his life, encoding his memoirs with Spanish locales and figures: Toulouse becomes Granada; Paris is Madrid; the province of Languedoc where Florian was born (in today's Gard départment) appears as Andalusia, while Provence is the Murcia province. Behind the famous dramatic poet Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), we have to guess Pierre Corneille, and the great name of Lope de Vega Félix Carpio (1562-1633) hides none other than Voltaire. Spain became the imaginary motherland of Florian's birth and youth, a biographical construction which bled into real life as hagiographers and commentators, during and after Florian's lifetime, picked up the fictional Castilian origin of his mother (who died while he was young) as authentic.[30] Florian might have remained an obscure provincial had it not been for the patronage of don Lope de Vega, aka Voltaire: indeed, Florian's paternal uncle had married Voltaire's niece, Marie-Elizabeth Mignot, the sister of Louise Mignot, later Mme Denis (also Voltaire's companion). We know that when he was ten Florian spent three months at Voltaire's Swiss estate in Ferney, an enchanted theater as it were, where he performed the small role of a shepherd who recited compliments to the famous actress, Mlle de Clairon, during the occasional *bergerie* (pastoral play), to the acclaim of Voltaire, who had nicknamed him Florianet.

After this idyllic childhood and pastoral adolescence under the tutelage of France's patriarch, emerges from his correspondence a figure quite characteristic of the ancient régime, that of a young aristocrat whose noble grandfather and father ruined their fortunes, who became page, then secretary, of the wealthy duc de Penthièvre, the

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legitimized son of Louis XIV and Mme de Montespan. Florian's world became one of aristocratic circles and brilliant salons, the realm of gallantry and sentimental intrigues, colored with preciousness and frivolity. In 1778, Florian joined the lodge of the Nine Sisters (which counted as its members Voltaire, Condorcet, André Chenier and, in 1779, Benjamin Franklin). His connections got him elected to the Académie française in 1788 at the young age of thirty-three years old—the promise of a glorious future on the eve of the Revolution. Named head of the National Guard at Sceaux, south of Paris where he resided, Florian persisted in writing and publishing, while suffering the loss of numerous friends and acquaintances sentenced to the guillotine. His well-meaning but odd request for permission to come to Paris to do research eventually made him suspect to the authorities, who had decreed the exile of all ex-nobles outside the capital, and led to his arrest on July 14, 1794. Florian escaped the guillotine and got out of prison after Robespierre's fall, but he died prematurely, at thirty-eight, a month after being freed from five weeks in jail.

Read in conjunction with his work, this biographical sketch helps nuance the politics of an author who seemed less the mild, secret, and conservative reactionary that posterity has remembered than a man conscious of inequalities and opening up to democratic, revolutionary ideals. He almost went to the Bastille for a discourse in verse, "Voltaire et le serf du mont Jura," and penned during the Revolution daring fables denouncing his contemporaries. He reacted to the French Revolution as a (royalist) partisan of justice and moderation, fearing violence, *and* as a *citoyen*, welcoming the abolition of unfair privileges.[31]

Prose vs. poetry. The revolutionary calendar

Is there a connection between *Gonzalve de Cordoue* and the revolutionary context during which Florian researched and wrote it, three decisive years, from the first mention of the book on 18 October 1788 in a letter, to its publication in December 1791? (401-2). The question has never been asked, as if the temporal and spatial remoteness of the story of Granada's reconquest precluded a connection with contemporaneous times. Florian's recently available correspondence, albeit still incomplete, allows us to propose some hypotheses though further research remains to be undertaken. Discreetly but undoubtedly, Florian's letters record a double movement: the historical, revolutionary events unfolding in France influenced his writing, *and* the Spanish history being researched and recounted colored the perception of these dramatic three years. Up and until August 1789, Florian seemed simply to juxtapose news of his writing progress and news of the onset of the Revolution,[32] yet starting in September 1789, commentaries on ongoing events bled into the perception of his work. On 15 September 1789, Florian recorded another successful public reading of *Gonzalve* in his circle of friends and wished for peace and calm, meditating on virtue as essential to happiness—a principle, he told his correspondent, that his own work precisely attempts to demonstrate (429-30).[33] On 23 September 1789, Florian wrote on how he witnessed the royal dishes being transported to the Monnaie, a symbolic surrender that prompted the comment that Spanish aristocrats, "the Cortes of Aragon and Castille," would have not allowed Isabella to do the same (431). In two letters from 20 and 23 October 1789, Florian admits to being "terriblement déroute" (terribly distracted/derailed) from his work, yearning for calm

(432-33). He confides his melancholy, “chagrin,” “idées noires” (sorrow, dark thoughts) from which he escapes by finding refuge in writing (435). Though Florian did not connect explicitly his changing mood to a new direction in his writing, he wrote that *Gonzalve de Cordoue* changed a lot (435). On 16 November 1789, Florian becomes more explicit in his analysis of the situation: he acknowledges the absurdity of some abusive practices and thus approves their abolition,[34] but also raises two important points:

> Le premier, c’est de savoir si l’assemblée est parfaitement sûre du vœu, du consentement, de l’adhésion des provinces et si elle a soin de s’en assurer souvent. Le second, c’est de savoir encore si l’union, l’intelligence des ministres du roi avec les députés est aussi intime, aussi franche, que je me plais à le penser. Voilà, je crois, les deux grands pivots de notre félicité, de notre tranquillité futures. Si ces deux bases sont certaines, tout ira, tout s’arrangera. (437)
>
> (The first issue is to know whether the Assembly is perfectly sure of the wishes, agreement, and support of the provinces, and whether it takes care of confirming it often. The second issue is to know also whether the unity and understanding of the king’s ministers with the deputies is as intimate and as frank as I’d like to think. Here are, I believe, the two great factors of our future happiness and tranquility. If these two bases are certain, all will go well, all will get better.)

The double concerns of the various provinces’ unity and allegiance to the Assembly on the one hand, and on the other hand, frank communication between the French Assembly delegates and the king’s ministers, seem premonitory in light of future events, when trust and unity completely unraveled. But if we keep in mind the gradual undoing of Moorish Spain, we may perhaps read Florian’s analysis as comparative history. On 20 March 1790, we find the first mention that Florian has already begun a historical synopsis that will precede the story (451). Since Florian decided to write his historical précis in January 1790, only after drafting the poem, and after the beginning of the French Revolution, could we not speculate that 1789 prompted the historian of modernity to second the poet? Subsequent letters (April-May 1790) emphasize how a painstakingly difficult task it proved to be, with a leitmotiv of the long and tiresome research required by the Précis—“pénible ouvrage,” “pénible tache” (453-54) (painstaking work, painstaking task). In May 1790, Florian is struggling to finish his work, and describes his efforts by means of a comparison with theater:

> Mes Maures et mes Castillans m’occupent sans cesse. La fin d’un ouvrage est toujours difficile. Celle surtout d’un *grand roman que j’ai voulu traiter comme un drame. Mes trente ou quarante acteurs se vengent sur la scène avec peine, chacun a son intérêt lié à l’intérêt général, chacun doit arriver au même but, et tous par des chemins divers*. Je suis souvent tenté de penser que mon sujet est au-dessus de mes forces. Mon faible talent reste au-dessous de mon imagination, et je ne puis pas conquérir les terres que j’ai découvertes. (454-55, emphasis added).
>
> (My Moors and my Castilians keep me constantly busy. Ending a work is always difficult. Especially the end of *a great novel, which I wanted to treat as drama. My thirty or forty actors struggle to take their revenge on stage, the interest of each one is linked to the general interest, each one must reach the same goal, but all through different pathways*. I am often tempted to think that my subject is beyond my

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> strength. My weak talent remains beneath my imagination and I cannot conquer the lands I have discovered.)

The generic mingling (or metamorphosis) of "a great novel" into "drama" seems to indicate the merging of fiction into the theater of history. It is possible that the synopsis of *Gonzalve*'s plot as the struggle of actors seeking revenge on a public stage, as a confusion of private and public interests and a disagreement on the means to reach a common end reflects not only the Christian vs. Moorish conflict that shook Spain and is the direct object of Florian's writing, but also, indirectly, the French people's own attempts to redress/revenge historical wrongs, the emergence of spokesmen, and their internal divisions. Florian admits feeling overwhelmed by the task, unable to "conquer the territories that [he] has discovered," perhaps not just a metaphor for difficult literary foray, but also the confession of a historian discovering parallels as he witnesses a reconquest of their rights by some French citizens and the loss of power and status by others. When Florian announces on 9 August 1790 that he has finished his "Histoire des Maures," he simply alludes to an ominous "fermentation sourde" (460-61) (underground fermentation). Then, on 19 February 1791, the printing of *Gonzalve* begins, with a publication in December. Though we do not know the changes Florian made when revising and editing his prose poem, I find intriguing echoes between the fate of the last Moorish rulers and the fate of French king Louis XVI. The comparison between the Muslim defeat and the French aristocrats' fall might seem farfetched in light of the social and religious battles that oppose the respective winning sides—the noble Ferdinand and Isabella's Christian conquest and the Third Estate's secular revolution—nevertheless, the emphasis Florian put on the Moors' past glory, their heroic deeds, the luxury of the Alhambra palace and the sublime Generalif (reminiscent of Versailles and its gardens), their gradual decadence as prosperity weakened them,[35] the court's divisions born of rivalries, the benevolence of some rulers vs. the absolutism of others, bear great similitude with the fate of the French aristocracy. The narrator of *Gonzalve* dramatizes the confrontation between the rival tribes of the famous Abencerages (wearing blue colors) and the violent and jealous Zegris (wearing black colors) as an ideological division between partisans of moderation, favorable to a constitutional monarchy vs. more aggressive political strategists, which France eventually experienced in the confrontation between Jacobins and Girondins. Florian stages the downfall of King Mulei-Hassem primarily as an alienation from his people. When the people failed to demonstrate their joy and love on the occasion of games organized by the king, he confides to his son: "j'ai trop vécu, ils ont cessé de m'aimer" (Florian, *Gonzalve*, vol 7 bk 2:230) (I have lived too long, they have ceased to love me). The subsequent description of Granada's uprising under the leadership of Boabdil pitches an out of control, "peuple effrené" (vengeful crowd) vs. a king besieged in his palace:

> Mulei-Hassem s'était retiré dans ce palais, presque seul avec sa famille. Nous le pressions dans nos faibles bras, nous cherchions à le rassurer, tandis qu'un effroi mortel nous ôtait la voix et les forces. Ce bon roi, sans crainte pour lui-même, n'était occupé que de ses sujets; c'était pour eux seuls qu'il versait des larmes et qu'il implorait l'Eternel: O Allah, s'écriait-il en élevant ses bras tremblans, brise mon sceptre, mais sauve mon peuple: pardonne-lui ses fureurs; on le trompe, on l'entraîne

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> au crime: ne le punis pas, ô Dieu de bonté! (ibid 235)
> (Mulei-Hassem had withdrawn in this palace almost alone with his family. We embraced him in our feeble arms; we tried to reassure him while a mortal fear deprived us of voice and strength. This good king, without fearing for himself, was only preoccupied by his subjects; for them alone did he shed tears and implore the Eternal: O Allah, he cried raising his trembling arms, break my scepter but save my people. Forgive its furor, it is being lied to and led to crime: do not punish them, O God of mercy!)

This portrait of a lenient, far-sighted king wishing the good of his people blinded by violent leaders, mirrors Florian's perception of Louis XVI throughout the revolutionary events. However, Mulei-Hassem's noble gesture as he voluntarily abdicates to prevent further carnage might point at how Florian would have preferred that the besieged French king behave. Opening the doors of his palace the Moorish ruler gives up his royal attributes and power: "Peuple de Grenade, mon règne t'a lassé, il est fini dès cet instant. Tu m'as repris ton amour, je ne veux plus de ta couronne. Viens la recevoir, Boabdil; viens prendre ce sceptre que tu désires, et que peut-être tu trouveras pesant" (ibid 237) (People of Granada, you have grown weary of my reign; from now on, it is over. You have taken back your love; I no longer want your crown. Come and receive it, Boabdil, come and take this scepter that you desire, and that you shall perhaps find heavy). By contrast, in June 1791, while Florian oversaw the printing of *Gonzalve*, the French king and his family fled to Varennes where they were recognized and arrested. This turn of events, which Florian (and many others) had not anticipated, marks the beginning of the end when it comes to Florian's positive perception of the Revolution underway. As Jean-Luc Gourdin notes, from October 1791 onward Florian "perdra son optimisme et ses illusions quant aux bienfaits de la Révolution" (*Mémoires et correspondance*, n2, 476) (will lose his optimism and illusions regarding the Revolution's benefits).

Florian's history of Granada's reconquest ends happily, though there is first the cameo of a defeated, emasculated Boabdil—who precipitated the Moors' downfall by betraying his father, Mulei-Hassem—chastised by his mother: "Oui, lui disait-elle, tu dois pleurer comme une femme, puisque tu n'as pas su comme un homme défendre le trône de tes aïeux" (*Gonzalve*, vol 18 bk 10:242 (Yes, she told him, you ought to cry like a woman since you could not defend the throne of your elders like a man). By contrast, the narrative ends with the epic representation of a manly, august Isabella riding a white, bejeweled stallion, triumphantly penetrating the city and receiving its keys. The queen also receives the double homage of the army, enthralled by her "nom glorieux," and the people in awe of her clemency (ibid 243). Moderation and tolerance govern her actions: "Calme et modeste après la victoire, elle protège les Maures, elle honore les Espagnols" (ibid) (Calm and modest following victory, she protects Moors and honors Spaniards). In the mosque, converted into a church, Queen Isabella prays for the empire that the "Dieu des armées" just gave her and "lui demande non d'augmenter cet empire, mais de lui donner des vertus qui peuvent render ses sujets heureux" (ibid) (asks him not to augment this empire but to give it virtues that shall make its subjects happy), thus favoring internal peace over wars of expansion. The epic prose then turns into a pastoral, Florian ending *Gonzalve de Cordoue* with superlatives and the easily recognizable "happily ever after"

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conclusion: "et le plus grand des héros [Gonzalve], le plus fidèle des amis [Lara], la plus aimable des épouses [Zuléma], commencèrent une longue suite de jours fortunés et glorieux" (ibid 244) (and the greatest hero, the most faithful friend, the most loveable wife, began a long series of happy and glorious days).

Melancholy pastoral

There is an enduring, mistaken preconception that authors of pastorals are disengaged from harsh contemporary socio-political realities, that multiple editions of pastorals simply fulfill a "besoin d'évasion," i.e. constitute escapism. The challenge is to understand and problematize the link between pastorals and the context during which they were written. For instance, Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, written during the wars of religion also comments on wars, though in a highly discursive manner. Sylvain Menant rightly remarks that the pastoral myth was paradoxically well inserted within Enlightenment ideology, pointing to Montesquieu and Rousseau (53). I interpret the surprising publication and reprints of pastorals, including Florian's, during the Enlightenment as much a sign of bittersweet melancholia and painful disquiet vis-à-vis modernity as an urge to suspend time by imagining a rosier past. It might be fair to say that death was never more present in Arcadia—"Ego in Arcadia est"—than during l'Âge des Lumières and the Revolution (cf. *Galatée* and the end of *Estelle*).

This might be why Florian was particularly drawn to Tomás de Iriarte (1750-1791).[36] Not only did they face similar worldly conventions and obligations, interact in a similar world of salons and societies, and share similar visions of social comedy and menagerie translated in fables, but they also shared a sense of melancholy or spleen. Ángel L. Prieto de Paula's analysis reveals, I think, why Iriarte appealed to Florian and how we could re-read Florian today as harboring a darker, more pessimistic vision of life, instead of dismissing him as a pastoral and fabulist has-been:

> *mal de la tierra,* el *fastidio universal*, el *spleen,* la *hipocondria...,* que hemos de entender como disociación entre su sensibilidad y los valores sociales vigentes. Este *mal de la tierra* no ha sido aún amasado en la crisis del positivismo, como ocurriría un siglo después de su muerte; ni siquiera se declara abiertamente, al modo romántico. Pero tal disensión, con los síntomas que permiten adivinarla, está presente en los escritos iriartianos. En este sentido, resulta especialmente revelador su poemilla titulado "Definición del mal que llaman *esplín*":
>
> Es el *esplín*, señora, una dolencia
> que de Inglaterra dicen que nos vino.
> Es mal humor, manía, displicencia,
> es amar la aflicción, perder el tino,
> aborrecer un hombre su existencia,
> renegar de su genio y su destino;
> y es, en fin, para hablarte sin rodeo,
> aquello que me da si no te veo. (Iriarte 52-53)
>
> [the *earth sickness*, the universal ennui, the spleen, hypochondria [...] that we have understood as a dissociation between his sensitivity and current social values. This *earth sickness* had not yet been reflected upon in the crisis of positivism, as will occur a century after his death; nor even declared itself openly in the romantic

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manner. But such dissension, with symptoms that are evident, is present in Iriarte's writings. In this sense, the result is especially revealing in his little poem titled "Definition of the sickness they call *spleen*: It is *the spleen,* my lady, an ailment/ that they say comes to us from England./ It is ill humor, dislike, displeasure,/ It is to love affliction, to lose judgment,/ To loathe for a man his existence,/ To renounce his genius and his destiny;/ And it is, finally, to speak to you without detours, what hits me if I do not see you.]

Prieto de Paula urges us to note "cómo Iriarte deshace, con el frívolo quiebro del verso final, la impresión singular con que nos había ganado. Pero, aun así, el escritor ha tratado de conceptualizar un *estado* que pertenece ya al universo de la modernidad" (ibid 53) [how Iriarte undoes, with the frivolous twist of the final verse, the peculiar impression that we had gained. But even so, the author has tried to conceptualize a *state* that belongs already to the universe of modernity.]

Like many prose poems, Florian's work conjures less optimistic Lumières than commonly drawn in favor of a more melancholy worldview. This goes with a vision less ideological and nationalistic than his contemporaries, more tolerant and cosmopolitan as Florian was unusually open-minded with regard to nationhood and religion. He mentally navigated between his birth country, France, and his elective, albeit never visited, motherland, Spain. Born of a Protestant mother and a Catholic father, he grew up in the Cevennes, a noted Protestant stronghold, reconciling this double Christian heritage by joining Freemasonry and endorsing a Catholicism tolerant and curious of all faiths. Florian's interest in Arab and Hebrew history is particularly notable: he explains in his correspondence how he is reading the Alcoran to research *Gonzalve* (401-2); à la Montesquieu, he peppers some of his letters with references to Muslim dates, to Allah, (402) and puts a Muslim holiday on a par with Easter—"ma pâque, mon beïram" (461). Another clue to his immersion in Arabic sources is the pseudonym with which he signs a letter, "L'arabe Kader ben Amri Florian," a Moorish poet (516). Hebrew culture similarly held his attention: he composed two eclogues inspired by the Old Testament, *Ruth et Booz* (1784) and *Tobie* (1792). Alongside "*Kemar et Amala,* plan d'un petit roman arabe," his posthumous publications include "Eliézer et Nephtaly, poème traduit de l'hébreu." Florian's self-positioning as both refined and popular, Parisian and provincial, Catholic and Freemason, French and Spanish, reveals an identity in flux negotiating between what we might call France's old and new world, the ancien régime and the revolutionary period.

History vs. Poetry. Pérez de Hita's *Guerras civiles de Granada*

Gonzalve de Cordoue was Florian's ultimate homage to Spain and "les deux sentiments idôles de vos grandes âmes, l'honneur sacré, le brûlant amour" (180) (the two feelings idolized by your great souls, sacred honor and burning love). His admiring (fantasmatic?) view of Spanish men and women as lovers/warriors, much nobler than the perceived effeminacy of French aristocracy or the Gothic excesses of English lords, informed his writing of Spanish history as poetry. In ten books, Florian narrates the reconquest of Granada by El Gran Capitán, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (1453-1516), known in French as Gonzalve de Cordoue. The story weaves the chronological thread of Granada's

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progressive undoing by internal rivalries among its Muslim rulers and by the external pressure of Christian conquerors, with romanesque scenes and dialogues picturing characters' love, friendship and rivalries. As a result, the prose is both factual and sentimental, in addition to intermingling epic and lyric tones, a characteristic of eighteenth-century prose poems. Further, Florian inserted ten poems in verse (one in each chapter except for two), which adds another layer of complexity. The stakes of *Gonzalve de Cordoue ou Grenade reconquise* emerge clearly when the narrative is contextualized in relation to the contemporary twin issues of history's methodology and poetry's essence—debates on how to practice history and poetry.

The genre of the Moorish novel had flourished in France throughout the seventeenth century, with a characteristic emphasis on love and sentiments explored in the complex setting of Christian vs. Muslim rivalries, rife with opportunities for adventures, contrarieties, and obstacles (Chaplyn 108). Eighteenth-century readers continued to enjoy Moorish novels, witness countless reprints, such as Mme de La Fayette's *Zayde* during the eighteenth century. But toward the end of the century, important histories of Spain's Moorish past were published that displaced fictionalized and sentimentalized versions. This contest between history and fiction is the backdrop of *Gonzalve de Cordoue*'s publication, making all the more notable Florian's decision to preface his fiction with a heavily researched chronology and summary of Spanish history from 705 B.C. to 1492. In another important change from earlier Moorish narratives, Florian's fiction attempted to stay true to history by de-emphasizing love as a motive. It would seem, therefore, that Florian ambitioned a more serious kind of imaginative work than his predecessors, legitimized by historical accuracy. Not only should we understand *Gonzalve de Cordoue* within the aesthetic battle on the genre of the prose poem, but we should also read it as a response to the Enlightenment's debate on how to write history. As a brief reminder, the philosophes, Voltaire in particular, strongly critiqued and distrusted the discipline of history as unreliable and partisan, based on forged or invented documents.[37] But in *Emile ou de l'éducation*, Rousseau tried to rehabilitate history, choosing (following Montaigne) Plutarch as "his man," his favorite historian, even though, paradoxically, Plutarch's history bordered on fiction.[38] Rousseau's solution was to decide that, since historians already wrote fiction, one must adopt history's fictionality. In lieu of maxims and reflections enunciated by philosophically minded historians, Rousseau advocated a Plutarchan emphasis on details, traits of character, anecdotes, and individual gestures ("peindre les grands hommes dans les petites choses" [Rousseau 286] [paint great men in small things])—resulting in less abstract and easier to remember human figures: "La physionomie ne se montre pas dans les grands traits, ni le caractère dans les grandes actions; c'est dans les bagatelles que le naturel se découvre" (ibid 287) (Physiognomy is not revealed by great traits nor character by great actions: but it is in trifles that the natural reveals itself). Whereas modern style by excess of decency cloaked historical figures with a coat of dignity in their public as well as private lives, Plutarch "excelle par ces mêmes details dans lesquels nous n'osons plus entrer" (ibid 286) (excels in these very details which we no longer dare evoke). Which view of history and methodology did Florian adopt? Did he follow Rousseau's advocacy of micro-history or Voltaire's macro-history? And if we recall that Florian was writing just before the advent of the nineteenth-century great historical school, with the likes of Augustin Thierry, François Guizot,

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Adolphe Thiers, and Jules Michelet, does his treatment of history appear avant-garde, or reactionary and *passéiste*? We can remark that, in the manner of these great historians of the Romantic period who all wrote historical novels à la Walter Scott the better to demark themselves eventually from the genre, Florian wrote a historical, poetic fiction immediately preceded by a chronological, factual history. The latter, the "Précis historique des Maures," combined the objectivity sought by Voltaire with the memorable anecdotes beloved by Rousseau and was unanimously praised for its precision, clarity, and accessibility. But I would argue that the story of *Gonzalve de Cordoue* might represent a more ambitious though poorly understood approach to history, one that attempted to merge the realms of memory and imagination, the fields of history and poetry, artificially separated by the encyclopedic tree of knowledge.

The key text to understanding Florian's hybrid work dates from 1595: *Historia de los vandos, de los Zegries y Abencerrages, cavalleros moros de Granada, de las civiles guerras que huvo…entre Moros y Christianos, hasta que el rey Don Fernando quito la ganó: agora nuevamente sacado de un libro aravigo, cuyo autor de vista fue un Moro llamado Aben Amin,… traduzido en castellano por Ginés Perez de Hita.* A first, important and anonymous French translation appeared in 1608, *L'histoire des guerres civiles de Grenade, traduite de l'espagnol en français*. Posterior to Florian's publication, a new translation by Sané in 1809 circulated widely on account of the translator's insightful preface, *Histoire chevaleresque des Maures de Grenade, traduite de l'espagnol de Ginès Pérez de Hita, précédé de quelques réflexions sur les Musulmans d'Espagne, avec des notes historiques et littéraires*. This version influenced Chateaubriand's own Moorish novella, *Atala. René. Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*. The most unusual and ingenious trait of Pérez de Hita's sixteenth-century history (itself translated from Arabic) is the insertion of approximately forty-five romances in verse.[39] The author repeatedly emphasizes the quality of these ancient but good romances: "buen Romance, aunque antiguo" (161); "sentido y antiguo Romance" (251) (a good Romance, albeit ancient; an ancient and sensitive romance). As they pick up the narrative thread of the prose account, romances are systematically introduced by a sentence, almost a formula, couched in similar, declarative terms: "Por esta batalla de los Alporches se hizo aquel romance antiguo que dize desta manera…" (12) (For this battle of the Alporches, that ancient romance was composed that goes in this manner…); "Por estas fiestas se compuso aquel Romance que dize…" (57) (For these fiestas, that Romance was composed that goes…); "De aquella batalla, y por esso se canto aquel Romance tan antiguo y famoso, que dize desta suerte…" (164) (About and because of this battle, that Romance so ancient and famous is sung that goes this way…); "un galan Romance de los nuevos, que ansi dize…" (289) (a new gallant Romance that goes thus…); "un Romance muy antiguo, que dize desta manera…" (304) (a very ancient Romance that goes this way…). Romances seem to play at least three different roles in the historical narrative: some romances take over history, so to speak, often as a dialogue between historical characters; other romances celebrate or commemorate a particular event, like battles, or the king's getting ready for war, or "fiesta de toros" (bull fiesta) and "juego de cañas" (game of canes) (145). Some romances stage a psychological moment, for example a warrior's love sorrows or the occasion of a bad advice/betrayal (177-78). A third kind of occurrence is when romances tell the *same* story as the narrative, and when, in a few

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cases, the same event is sung in two different romances. The author signals the composition of new romances based on "la misma material" (249) (the same material). Instead of appreciating the poetic effect of reinforcement, most translators/imitators decided such juxtapositions were simply redundant. To the contrary, these romances do not simply translate the prose version in verse, they are both performative and interpretative. The author offers a comment on the particularity of one romance, so moving in its original Arabic tongue that it was banned for fear of spreading melancholia among the defeated people, though it survived because translated into Castilian (362). Another comment helps us understand today Pérez de Hita's belief in the usefulness of romances, even if ancient, to decipher history: "Desta manera va este Romance diziendo más este y el otro passado, todos vienen a un punto y a una misma cosa. Y aunque son Romance viejos, es muy bueno traerlos a la memoria, para los que ahora vienen al mundo; porque entiendan la historia porque se cantaron. Y aunque los Romances son viejos, son buenos para el effecto digo" (165) (238 in French) (In this manner this Romance is going to tell much, this one and the past other, all come to a point and to the same thing. And though they are old Romances, it is very good to remember them for those who come in the world now so that they understand the history of why they are sung. And though Romances are old, they are good, I say so). Finally, we should note how at the very end of the volume, the author conveys a highly symbolic disagreement among poets on historical accuracy, hence variable accounts of a key battle.

Florian's romances, though much fewer than Pérez de Hita's romances, owe to their source both aesthetic and ideological characteristics, well summed up by the translator Sané. The romance, "ce genre de poème à-la-fois lyrique, élégiaque, pastoral et descriptif, qui se renferme dans le cercle borné d'un récit de guerre ou d'amour, naquit aux premiers siècles du monde, sous les tentes du Désert" (Pérez de Hita, *Histoire chevalresque* 1: 1) (a type of poem at the same time lyrical, elegiac, pastoral and descriptive, enclosed within the limited circle of a tale of war or love, was born in the world's first centuries, under the tents of the desert). In view of the French eighteenth-century quest for more natural, spontaneous, and expressive poetic forms than a tightly regulated versification would allow, we can read the appeal of romances as answering Florian's project to wed novelty and antiquity, to rejuvenate lyrical expression with a long lost naïveté conveyed by this very versatile form. According to Sané, "Rien n'égale pour la simplicité, l'absence totale des ornemens ambitieux, les sentimens naturels, les romances qui retracent les querelles et l'ivresse des amans" (ibid liii) (in terms of simplicity, complete lack of ambitious ornaments, and natural feelings, nothing equals romances recounting lovers' quarrels and intoxication). Sané captures all the distinctive traits that French poets and critics in the second half of the eighteenth century cultivated to escape the overly codified, ornamental, and didactic poetics of their times:

> Elle [la romance Castillane] conserve toujours ce charme de naturel et de vérité, même dans les sujets les plus élevés; elle n'est jamais parée, ne parle jamais avec pompe, et chez elle les sentimens les plus fiers, les élans de l'héroïsme ont une sorte de grandeur naïve dont on ne peut trouver de modèles que dans les écrits des anciens jours. *C'est véritablement la poésie primitive* (ibid lvii). (emphasis added)
>
> (It [the Castilian romance] always maintains the charm of the natural and truth, even in the noblest subject matters. It is never ornate, never speaks with pomp. In the

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romance the most proud sentiments and heroic élans have a sort of naïve grandeur whose model we can only find in the writings of ancient days. *It is truly primitive poetry*.)

The verse romances in *Gonzalve de Cordoue* should not be viewed as ornamental or cute bagatelles, but as fulfilling the same aesthetic agenda that I underlined when analyzing the narrative as a "poëme en prose," namely to reconquer poetry. But we should note a telling reversal: while Florian inserted in his prose conventional poetic ornaments to achieve an elevated diction (with rather artificial, stilted results), he removed any hackneyed or witty rhetorical embellishments from his romances, achieving lightness and directness. Further, in keeping with tradition, Florian composed/translated his romances in octosyllables, a verse which had fallen to the wayside in France since the seventeenth century in favor of the omnipresent alexandrine. The most frequently used verse in old French, the octosyllable verse "devient essentiellement le vers lyrique au XVIe siècle, le vers de l'ode, et garde cette fonction aux XVIIe, XVIIIe et XIXe siècles, sans cesser pour cela de servir toujours pour la poésie légère" (Grammont 43) (becomes effectively the lyrical verse in the sixteenth century, the verse used in odes, and it keeps this function in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, without ceasing nevertheless to be used for light poetry). Romances brought an antique patina to the prose narrative and their lyricism let readers hear the music of long gone voices.

The aesthetic importance of romances is reinforced by their ideological role within the narrative, and here again Florian found in Pérez de Hita an apt guide to approach the difficult task of writing history. Sané remarked on the hybrid character of *Historia de los vandos, de los Zegries y Abencerrages, cavalleros moros de Granada*—an authentic, historical core behind the "physiognomie romanesque" (physiognomy of a novel): "Comme elle abonde en récits d'amours, de fêtes et de jeux, en *romances*, en descriptions animées, elle en reçoit une physionomie romanesque: mais ces romances, ces amours et ces fêtes, sont des choses historiques; et tous les personnages qui y figurent, ont existé" (Pérez de Hita, *Histoire chevaleresque des Maures*, xlvii) (Since it abounds with tales of love, festivities and games, with *romances* and lively descriptions, it receives the physiognomy of a novel. However these romances, loves and festivities are historical; and all the characters represented did exist).

Sané interprets Pérez de Hita's insertion of romances within his history as methodological. With prose no longer having the prerogative of truth, romances too offer historical evidence: "Chaque épisode, chaque incident, une bataille, un duel, une sérénade, un carrousel, une querelle d'amans, fournissent à Ginès Pérez le sujet d'une romance; et il semble la présenter comme un témoignage de l'évidence du fait qu'il raconte" (Pérez de Hita, l) (Each episode, each incident, battle, duel, serenade, carousel, and lovers' quarrel give Ginés Pérez the subject for a romance; and he seems to present the latter as a testimony of evidence for the fact he is recounting). More specifically, romances help transmit socio-cultural details, painting the portrait of an entire culture: "Celle dont l'unique objet est de peindre une fête, un hymen auguste, un tournoi, un combat de taureaux, contiennent des détails de mœurs qui sont encore un sujet d'étude pour les historiens les plus graves" (Pérez de Hita, liii-liv) (Romances, the sole purpose of which is to paint a festivity, a solemn wedding, a tournament, or a bull's fight, contain

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details of social and cultural habits that are still an object of study for the most serious historians). Thus, while some romances individualize historical figures, staging their passions and giving voice to their conflicts and grief, other romances insert bits of cultural history to accompany the timeline of events and deeds told in prose. In the Enlightenment debate on how best to write history, Pérez de Hita would seem to belong to the category of unreliable historians criticized by Voltaire for getting away from facts and be perhaps closer to Rousseau's Petrarchan conception of individualizing historical figures to humanize them and make them more memorable. But what remains unique in writing history with romances is the recording of an oral transmission alongside the conventionally accepted written documents. There is no doubt that this aspect of Pérez de Hita's work struck a chord with those Enlightenment authors less inclined toward scientific accuracy as applied to history than toward a history that is remembrance. As they transmit and conserve both individual actions and a culture's mores, romances play the role of memorial, which, incidentally, might justify their inscription on the memory branch of the encyclopedic tree of knowledge. Sané uses a particularly felicitous, Benjaminian-like phrase to underscore the key role, both aesthetic and historical, of romances as *vestiges*: "On doit même l'élever jusqu'à la hauteur des monumens historiques: 'Car, disent les élégans écrivains que nous avons déjà cité, *ces romances sont autant de débris de l'histoire contemporaine*, et referment presque toutes un fait, une anecdote authentique.' " (Pérez de Hita, [li]i[i]) (We must even elevate it to the height of historical monuments: 'because, as the good writers we quoted above have said, *these romances are as many debris of contemporary history*, and almost all contain an authentic fact or anecdote'). Romances that have survived time resemble monuments in ruins. As such they ought to be preserved, researched, and admired (in the spirit of Volney's understanding of history, whom Sané has in mind here). They stand as "debris," the remains of a history that was once committed to memory in verse form. And so, a much more complex and original picture of *Gonzalve de Cordoue* emerges: first, it is preceded by a "Précis historique" written with modern precision and objective prose, featuring a handy chronology and a clear division of Spanish early history into four epochs; second, it relates the episodes of Granada's reconquest in a hybrid prose mixing epic and lyric tones; third, it includes romances as the historical and poetic remnants of the Spanish age that is being described. Florian's *Gonzalve de Cordoue* does not translate a reactionary, nostalgic turn toward some sort of troubadour past in opposition to what we term somewhat too uniformly and singularly the Enlightenment, but an ambitious project in the spirit of the plural *Lumières*, one beam of which sought not simply to conjugate poetry with history to renew the former and humanize the latter, but also to uphold the Aristotelian premise that poetry is more universal than history—an invitation to reconsider poetry's place in the tree of knowledge.

Notes

[1] Montesquieu's prose poem *Le Temple de Gnide* has been largely ignored contrary to the famed *Lettres persanes* and his ground-breaking *Esprit des lois*. Rousseau's prose poem *Le Lévite d'Ephraïm* stands in the margins vs. his acclaimed *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and his political treatises. The fallen reputation of eighteenth-century poetry collapsed Voltaire's reputation as epic poet (*La Henriade*) while his philosophical tales

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have now completely displaced the epic poetry that established his reputation.

[2] For a critical overview and analysis of French eighteenth-century poetry, see Michel Delon, 7-31.

[3] M. l'abbé Fraguier, "Qu'il ne peut y avoir de poëmes en prose." See Voltaire's exclamation: "Qu'est-ce qu'un poème en prose, sinon un aveu de son impuissance?" (What is a prose poem if not an admission of its impotence?) Voltaire, "Discours aux Welches," in *Mélanges* (Paris, 1951), 695.

[4] See Fabienne Moore, *Prose Poems of the French Enlightenment*, 63-99.

5 See Boileau's *Art poétique*. Boileau excludes new genres, and dismisses the "roman frivole" popularized by Mme de Scudéry and La Calprenède.

[6] See Florian, "Le Laboureur de Castille." In *Fables,* 225-27.

[7] See Antoine de Rivarol, "Sur Florian," in *Œuvres*, vol. 2, (1808), 254. On Florian's relationship with contemporary and fellow Languedocien, Rivarol, see Michel Cointat, 99-106. See also André Bouis, Introduction.

[8] See Léo Claretie, *Florian*, 119.

[9] See Claretie and Bouis.

[10] Florian, *Cinq arlequinades. Comédies*.

[11] Florian, *Nouvelles*.

[12] See Houssaye, "Florian," 216; Sainte-Beuve, 229-48, and Gourdin, 192.

[13] Unlike recent studies on Florian (cf. Cointat and Gourdin), I refrain from using the classification "romans" to refer to Florian's pastoral and historical fictions in prose. The shifting terminology "poëme en prose" is key to understanding the author's ambition and the controversy generated by the new genre.

14 See Marie-Antoinette's "bon mot" regarding Florian's *Numa Pompilius* (1786), an epic poem in prose that she compared to eating "de la soupe au lait," suggesting a bland, uninspired and tame fare (Gourdin, 194-5; Claretie, 116). But in his 1876 commentary, Arsène Houssaye—Baudelaire's friend—relayed the bon mot differently, namely as favorable to Florian, suggesting that Marie-Antoinette likened *all* of Florian's work with "de la soupe au lait" to emphasize the pleasing simplicity and naturalness of which she herself was so fond in her Petit Trianon refuge (Houssaye 221) On the one hand, interpreters believe that Marie-Antoinette's disappointed reading experience stemmed from Florian's lack of poetic energy, milky soup suggesting a spiceless, insipid, and ordinary soup; on the other hand, Houssaye seems to have read the "soupe au lait" as a restorative beverage, milk being a symbol of purity, naïveté and innocence eagerly sought after by eighteenth-century readers disoriented with the face of progress, and by a queen shunning harsh realities

[15] Rivarol attributes the obligation of writing epic poems to pressure from the Academy, where he believed Florian was elected because of pressure from women (who enjoyed his lighter pieces). See Rivarol, "Sur Florian," 235.

[16] Unlike his fables, novellas and plays, none of the prose poems have been reprinted since Florian's 1829 version. The *Œuvres complètes de Florian* (11 vols) are now available as electronic texts in the Gallica catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

[17] Boileau's essay on poetics first presents minor then major genres. It lays down rules to achieve perfection and principles of judgment, good sense and good taste (rejecting for

example conceits and the burlesque). Voltaire's popular *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1727) further upheld the superiority of the epic and deemed verse so essential as to exclude Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*.

18 See Florian's letter to Gessner in Florian, *Mémoires et correspondance*, 246.

19 Ibid., 247. Other sources of inspiration include Hebrew poetry, the Bible, and the Orient in general; also Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, whom Florian knew and admired. Saint-Pierre's popular *Paul et Virginie* set in the Bourbon island was published in 1788, the same year as *Estelle*, and the success of the exotic tropics quickly overshadowed Florian's pastoral Occitania.

20 See for example, Bitaubé's *Joseph, en neuf chants* (1717); Jacques Cazotte's *Ollivier, poëme* (1763); Marmontel's *Les Incas; ou la destruction de l'empire du Pérou* (1777); Abbé Reyrac's *Hymne au soleil* (1777); Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* (1809).

21 See Florian, *Gonzalve de Cordoue*, in *Œuvres complètes de Florian*, vol. 7, livre 1, 179-80.

22 See Florian, *Gonzalve*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8, livre 6, 93 and livre 8, 154.

23 See Florian, *Gonzalve*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, livre 2, 233.

24 "Ce lieu de délices est environné d'un jardin plus délicieux encore, dont la touchante simplicité contraste avec le luxe du palais" (This place of delight is surrounded by an even more delightful garden, its touching simplicity contrasting with the palace's luxury). Ibid., livre 1, 212-13 and 217.

25 "Marie-Antoinette ne florianisait-elle pas à Trianon?" (Didn't Marie-Antoinette florianize at the Trianon?) Houssaye 221.

26 See Claretie 102-3.

27 See Ferdinand Brunot, *Le français, langue nationale*, 7.

28 Florian, "Notes," *Gonzalve*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, n3, 233.154.

29 For more on debates, theories and examples of "poëmes en prose," see Moore, *Prose Poems of the French Enlightenment*.

30 See for instance Bouis, Introduction. *Mémoires d'un jeune espagnol*, 12-13.

31 See Florian, Lettre 300 (20 octobre 1789) 432-33; and Lettre 304 (14 novembre 1789). Florian, *Mémoires et correspondance*, 437. Hereafter cited parenthetically within text.

32 On 24 April 1789, Florian tells his correspondent he has completed eight cantos and decided to dedicate his book to the Queen of Spain; he also reports on the division among the États Généraux gathered at Versailles (ibid., 417-18). On 18 June 1789, Florian has finished his first draft and anticipates spending eighteenth months to correct it; he mentions the constitution of the Third estate and a "great fermentation" (ibid., 421). On 20 June 1789, Florian tells of his public reading of *Gonzalve*; he also expresses his concern vis-à-vis ongoing political crisis (ibid., 422-23).

33 See the invocation at the opening of *Gonzalve de Cordoue*: "rappelez à tous les rois du monde que les seuls soutiens de leur trône sont la justice et la vertu" (Remind all kings in this world that the only supports of their throne are justice and virtue). Florian, *Gonzalve*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, livre 1, 180.

34 See Florian's approval of the decrees confiscating the clergy's possessions. Florian, *Mémoires et correspondance*, 437.

35 "La prospérité nous amollit; nos rois devinrent des tyrans" (Prosperity weakened us; our kings became tyrants). Florian, *Gonzalve*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, livre 2, 212.

36 On the influence of Iriarte's *Fábulas literarias* (1783), see Jean-Noël Pascal, Introduction. *Fables de Florian*, 43-44.

37 I am indebted to Philippe Roger's Spring 2009 EHESS seminar on "La reprise des Anciens" for this analysis of Voltaire and Rousseau's views on history.

38 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation*, 286.

39 The early 1608 anonymous French translation is noteworthy for the translation in verse of the romances, mostly with

octosyllables and occasionally with alexandrine verses. The word *Roman* is used in lieu of *Romance*. But the last three romances in this early 1608 French translation are written in prose and couched in italics.

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