

The ‘Giant Affair’: Byron, the Neapolitans, and the Papal States

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The objective of this paper is to use newly discovered material from Italian national archives to give an account of Byron’s connection with the alleged Neapolitan carbonaro Giuseppe Gigante, whose visit to the poet in Ravenna in March 1821 led to a flurry of correspondence between Byron and the Papal authorities. The case and its unhappy aftermath – including Gigante’s arrest and well-documented trial – have been largely ignored by scholars. Yet it created a political storm at the time, and forced Byron to leave the Papal States. This paper, therefore, examines the evidence and investigates Byron’s connections with both the Neapolitans and the liberal uprisings of 1821.

The ‘Giant affair’ started as nothing more than a teasing wordplay in a letter written by Byron to the secretary of the Legate Cardinal of Ravenna, Count Giuseppe Alborghetti, on 25th May 1821.¹ Byron translated the surname of the unfortunate Giuseppe Gigante into English: hence “Giant” or, better, “*Signor Giant*”. This was Byron’s way of mocking, and, if possible, undermining the “*gigantically*” annoying inquiries the Papal authorities were making into the case. Gigante had been arrested on suspicion of Carboneria in the Marches two months earlier, on 22nd March 1821.² He had first been stopped in Senigallia, then arrested in Pesaro. Following the arrest, the authorities hoped to uncover Byron’s links to the “poor devil of a Neapolitan”.³ Byron was implicated because, just before the suspect had reached the Marches, he had visited the poet in Ravenna and begged for money to return to Naples. Gigante had been robbed on his journey and left literally “without breeches”.

The arrest of this unknown man turned out to be a good deal less amusing than Byron’s letters make it sound. “Poor Mylord! How many troubles for a trifle!” wrote Alborghetti.⁴ But this was no trifle. The case would have fatal consequences, and Byron would be forced into exile by it. He would be obliged to leave the Papal States and move to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Gigante himself, a tall, thin thirty-year old man, with a bearded olive face, found himself locked up in the Civitavecchia Fort accused of “awful qualities in matters political”.⁵ After three years of blasphemies, “disturbance of the peacefulness of the prisons”, and pleading for freedom, Gigante was dead. Ignored and forgotten, he had perished from consumption.⁶

When we examine the usual Byron sources, the tale appears blurred and drenched in reactionary paranoia. Byron’s friends and biographers all squeeze proto-Risorgimental myths and Byron-mania into the story. Following in Gigante’s footsteps, we might say that the case was deeply blurred, captivatingly tragic, and quintessentially Italian. Indeed, its murky imprecision reveals something profound about the state of the country at that time.

The story of Gigante, then, is often mentioned. But the details are usually confused and there tends to be a lack of understanding of the overall picture. Why did earlier Italy-based Byron scholars, such as Harry Nelson Gay or Iris Origo, not find the Gigante trial papers? One reason could be simple administrative confusion. The documents are protocolled in the Secret Archives of the Vatican, but preserved in the National Archives of

1: BLJ VIII, p. 124.

2: National Archive of Pesaro (A.S.P.), Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, Series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 64.

3: BLJ VIII, p. 131.

4: Marchand, L.A., “Lord Byron and Count Alborghetti”, in PMLA LXIV (December 1949), p. 999.

5: National Archive of Rome (A.S.R.), Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), ff. 360-1.

6: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), ff. 164, 195v., 341-57, 399.

Rome. In 1908 Nelson Gay contacted the National Archives to check for these documents, but was directed to the Register of Protocol of the State Internal Affairs Secretariat in the Vatican.⁷ There is no evidence in the Gay Papers that Nelson Gay ever saw the trial papers. The papers must have been moved at a later date. Anyone attempting to research the case in the Vatican at any time in the last sixty years would have thought the papers lost. Meanwhile, other relevant documents were scattered between Romagna and the Marches. The National Archive of Pesaro has an entire file on Gigante, which was compiled by Count Giuseppe Mamiani,⁸ the Deputy Police Director of Senigallia, before Gigante's transfer from Pesaro to Civitavecchia.⁹ In the National Archive of Ancona there are also traces of the attempt by the authorities there to identify a network of carbonari Gigante was supposedly trying to stir up during his wanderings.¹⁰ From the contemporary correspondence between the Legates and Delegates in various towns conveys the impression that the Gigante trial was a matter of major concern for the Papal authorities.

Traditional accounts of the Gigante affair shed light – and in some cases darkness – upon this curious case. The main and most widely-known sources are the correspondence: between Byron and the English Consul in Venice (Richard B. Hoppner); between Byron and the Legate of Ravenna's secretary (Alborghetti); and between the Legate of Ravenna (Cardinal Antonio L. Rusconi) and the Pope's secretary (Cardinal Consalvi). These letters have surfaced in various ways and, until recently, were considered in isolation from one another.¹¹ Put briefly, what they reveal is merely that Byron was obliged to respond to a letter of enquiry from Cardinal Rusconi. In his letter Byron confirmed merely that Gigante had indeed petitioned him after being robbed, and that Byron had given him some money. Furthermore, Byron had met Gigante and ascertained that he possessed a valid passport from the Neapolitan Government. Alborghetti helped Byron to write this letter, and ensure that it followed a suitable formula and tone. Together with the "letter to the Cardinal", Byron enclosed "the petition of this Signor Giant".

Much of the correspondence to and from Alborghetti has been published, and has been described in detail by Leslie A. Marchand.¹² However, a reference to a further letter written by Byron to Alborghetti (Ravenna, 26th May 1821) has turned up on the internet, in a catalogue for an auction at Christie's:

George Gordon Noel Lord Byron. (1788-1824 celebre poeta inglese, morto in Grecia). Lettera a.f. inedita, diretta al poeta romano conte Alberghetti [*sic*]. lord Byron gli manda una lettera in favore del patriota napoletano Giuseppe Gigante, che ha già scritto una petizione. Quanto all'estratto dell'opera del Muratori – aggiunge – esso è "all that was ever attempted [*sic*] to be printed..." etc. Negli scritti del Muratori gli Italiani trovarono un primo sentimento dell'Unità italiana; d'altra parte Lord Byron, che viveva a Ravenna, presso la sua amante, contessa Teresa Guiccioli, si interessava da vicino ai movimenti rivoluzionari e indipendentisti in Italia e in Grecia. Significativo e' dunque il suo appoggio, qui espresso, al carbonaro napoletano condannato dopo i moti del marzo-aprile precedenti. Ravenna, 26 maggio 1821. 1p. in-8. Molto raro!¹³

The letter, sold in Rome in March 1992, was described as "a very rare piece", showing Byron as being "in favour of the Neapolitan patriot Giuseppe Gigante", and expressing "Byron's support of the Neapolitan carbonaro condemned after the uprising of March and April 1821". The same letter later turned up in the catalogue of another auction, at the Boutique of Geneva, where Gigante's name – for some reason – was mistaken for that of the Parisian publisher Giovanni A. Galignani:

[Byron envoie le texte d'une lettre rédigé en bonne et due forme et prie son correspondant d'avoir la bonté de joindre à la missive la pétition de J.A. Galignani] "as a document in his favour. The extract from Muratori is *all* that was that ever attempted to be printed – & was printed solely to send to England as a note. --"¹⁴

7: Keats-Shelley Memorial House, Rome, Gay Papers 36C.

8: Brother of the famous Risorgimento politician and writer Terenzio Mamiani (1799-1885).

9: A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, Series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2.

10: National Archive of Ancona (A.S.A.), Prefettura del Metauro e della Delegazione Apostolica, Series XX: Polizia, envelope 1260.

11: See Peter Cochran's website for the first digital collection of letters to and from Byron: <http://petercochran.wordpress.com/>

12: See mainly BLJ VIII and MARCHAND, "Lord Byron and Count Alborghetti", pp. 976-1007.

13: <http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/LotDetailsPrintable.aspx?intObjectID=2476471>

14: BLJ *Supplementary Volume*, p. 58.

This means that Marchand, when preparing his Supplementary Volume of Byron's Letters and Journals, would have been able to read the auctioneer's description, but would have had no way of knowing its context in the Gigante case.

A fragment of the photograph of the letter from the Cardinal to Byron¹⁵ is kept among the Origo Papers in the Keats-Shelley House in Rome, but it has never been published.

Mylord

Per corrispondenza ad alcune ricerche fattemi dall'Eminentissimo Sig. Card. Seg.rio di Stato in sussidio di giustizia, sono costretto ad incomodare Vostra Eccellenza, e a pregare la sua nota gentilezza a farmi la grazia di fornirmi riservatamente alcuni schiarimenti, e notizie sopra la persona di un tal Giuseppe Gigante Napoletano, attualmente detenuto nelle carceri di Sinigaglia. Si brama sapere da Lei

1° Se è vero, che circa la metà dello scorso mese di marzo il detto Gigante venne in Ravenna, e si presentò al Sig. Antonio Lega Zambelli di Brisighella di Lei Segretario, e che col di lui mezzo fece presentare a Vostra Eccellenza una Supplica previamente da Lui scritta nella bottega di un Libraio vicino all'ufficio di Polizia, nella quale esponendo di essere stato grassato nella Via di Scarical'Asino, Le domandava una qualche sovvenzione.

2° Se è vero, che detta sovvenzione Le fu puntualmente accordata dalla di Lei generosità nella somma di dieci doppie effettive e di alcuni oggetti di vestiario.

3° Se è vero, che per contestare a V.E. la sua gratitudine, col mezzo dello stesso Sig. Lega suo Seg.rio si presentò a Lei personalmente, e Le ne fece [...].¹⁶

The response – the letter from Byron to the Cardinal (Ravenna, 25th May 1821) which was handwritten by Alborghetti and signed by Byron – was discovered in Ravenna much later by Andrea Casadio.¹⁷ Alborghetti made several copies of this letter. One was sent to Hoppner (“the enclosed, ‘to the *Cardinal*’”¹⁸), one preserved by the Legate of Ravenna,¹⁹ and another was sent to the Vatican where it is kept among the trial papers:

Eminenza

Sono ben contento di poter avere una occasione di prestarmi alle ricerche del Governo, e di eseguire i rispettabili comandi dell' E.V., a cui professo una particolare stima, e deferenza. Rispondo adunque con tutta ingenuità ai tre quesiti, ch'Ella mi fa sulla persona di Giuseppe Gigante Napoletano.

1°. E' verissimo, che per mezzo del mio Seg.rio Lega, il medesimo mi presentò una Supplica, in cui mi chiedeva un soccorso, esponendomi di essere stato assassinato nella via di *Scarical'Asino*.

2°. E' parimenti vero, che io gli feci dare la somma di dieci Doppie effettive; ma quanto agli oggetti di vestario, credo gli fossero dati di qualche mio Domestico, ma non da Me.

3°. Finalmente è vero, che mi fu presentato dal detto mio Segretario, e mi ringraziò; e connobbi allora il medesimo per la prima volta. So inoltre, ch'egli era munito di un Passaporto in regola del Governo Napoletano. A maggiore schiarimento, e prova di quanto ho asserito, accludo a Vostra Eminenza la stessa Petizione del Gigante colla postilla di carattere del mio Segretario Lega.

15: The photograph is not clear but appears to show the letter dated 28th May 1821, which is odd as the response was written on 25th May 1821.

16: Keats-Shelley Memorial House, Rome, Gay Papers, Origo Papers 36D. Unfortunately, the last part of the photograph is missing.

[Translation: My Lord / From correspondence and investigations into me by His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State in the cause of justice, I am obliged to inconvenience Your Excellency, and to beg your gracious attention, and to ask you to furnish me in confidence certain clarifications and points concerning the person of one *Giuseppe Gigante*, a Neapolitan, currently imprisoned in Sinigaglia. I need to know from you, 1stly if it is true, that in the middle of March last the said Gigante came to Ravenna, and presented himself to Signor Lega Zambelli from Brisighella, your secretary, and with his help presented to Your Excellency a deposition, written in the front room of a bookseller's shop near the police station, in which he claimed to have been assaulted in the *Via di Scarical'Asino*, and asked you for compensation. 2ndly, if it is true that you at once provided him, out of your generosity, with the sum of ten *Doppias*, and with certain items of clothing. 3rdly, if it is true, that, to show his gratitude to Your Excellency, he was presented to you personally by Signor Lega, your Secretary, and that you made him [...].

In *The Last Attachment* (p. 253) Iris Origo gives only a summary of the original letter. According to a note she left behind the photograph, the original was held in the Murray Archives, but might have been lost as the Murray Archives' curator was unable to find it.

17: His discovery was published in two different papers: Casadio, A., “Il poeta e i cardinali. Una lettera autografa e due episodi oscuri del soggiorno di Byron a Ravenna”, in *Romagna arte e storia* LVI (1999), pp. 37-52; and “Two new letters from Byron's stay in Ravenna”, in *The Byron Journal* XXIX (2001), pp. 90-7.

18: BLJ VIII, p. 131.

19: Casadio, “Two new letters from Byron's stay in Ravenna”, p. 91.

Altro non posso dirle in argomento; ma credo, che tutto ciò basterà, e mentre mi compiaccio di aver soddisfatto alle premure di V.E. Le prometto eziandio quella prudenza, e segretezza, che mi raccomanda, e mi protesto con singolar rispetto, e colla più alta considerazione Di Vostra Eminenza.²⁰

One final source is Gigante's petition to Byron, as filed in the trial papers along with other evidence of his supposed sectarianism:

Eccellenza

Il Portatore della presente e [*sic*] un sfortunato Professore [*sic*] di Filosofia Medicina, e di Lingue diverse. Proveniente da Napoli, strada facendo mi fù derubato ogni cosa per cui ora non so in qual modo proseguire il mio Viaggio ritrovandomi privo d'un decente vestiario; non solo: ma eziandio ad una Misera Sussistenza.

Nobile! Imploro dalla Somma bontà di V.E. un parco soccorso [*sic*] alle estreme mie necessità [*sic*] conoscendo per fama il [*sic*] animo generoso di V.E. di sollevare gli Afflitti particolarmente le persone civilizzate così [?] non credo che abandonar' vorà [*sic*] un suo simile che già non lo fa per costume, ma per solo Emergenza.

Quindi prego perdonare al disturbo che reco e distintamente passo a baciarle umil.te le mani.²¹

This unpublished document is interesting because, although it introduces Gigante to Byron as “an unlucky Professor of Medicine and several Languages”, it is so inelegant and full of misspellings that it is unlikely to have been written by a well-educated person. Moreover, Gigante gauchely seeks to liken himself to Byron on account of his “civility”. Despite the fascination involved in recreating the jigsaw puzzle – and the delight of discovering a new Byron source – nothing earth-shattering seems to emerge from all this documentation. Gigante comes across as a somewhat hapless buffoon. Byron, as usual, seems to have known far more than he revealed in his letters. All the sources mentioned above are formal, administrative papers. Never once do they thoroughly explain either the Gigante affair or whether Byron was ever directly accused of conspiring with Gigante.

Much more revealing is what the early biographers make of this material. On the basis of no evidence at all, they cheerfully leap to wild interpretations, all the while attempting to imbue the story with political meaning. Thomas Moore was the first to claim a connection between Gigante and the Neapolitan army, and between Gigante and Byron's famous *Address to the Neapolitan Government*. It was Moore who first published the *Address*, which has been depicted as “one of [Byron's] most deeply felt and transparently sincere political utterances on behalf of political freedom”.²² One might hope that, to establish this connection, Moore had relied on testimony from Byron's closest friends. He said the *Address* had been entrusted by Byron to “a professed agent” of the Neapolitan army (but Moore didn't seem to know his name), who pretended to have been robbed, but this “agent” was, in truth, a spy and messenger for the Neapolitan General Pepe.²³ Somehow Moore believed

20: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), N° 450.

[**Translation:** Eminence / I am very pleased to have the occasion to offer my help in the investigations of the Government, and to fulfill the respectable orders of Your Eminence, whom I hold in particular regard and deference. With great naturalness, I answer therefore the three questions you ask about the Neapolitan Giuseppe Gigante. / 1st. It is indeed true that, through my Secretary Lega, this very man presented a petition to me, wherein he asked for help and explained that he had been robbed by armed men at Scarical'Asino. / 2nd. It is also true that I ordered the sum of ten *Doppias* to be given to him; but as for clothes, he was given them by some servant of mine, but not by me. / 3rd. Finally, it is true that he was introduced to me by my secretary, and he thanked me; and that was the first time I met this man. Also, I know that he was provided by the Neapolitan Government with a valid passport. To clarify further, and to provide evidence of what I assert, I enclose for Your Eminence the same petition of Gigante with an annotation handwritten by my secretary Lega. / I cannot tell you more about this matter; but I believe all this will be enough, and while I am pleased to satisfy Your Eminence's attention, I also promise caution and reserve, as you recommend to me, and I declare myself with particular respect and with the highest consideration / Of Your Eminence.]

21: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, Busta 61, fascicolo 1973 (2045), N° 451.

[**Translation:** Excellency/ The messenger of the present is an unlucky professor of Philosophy, Medicine and various Languages. Coming from Naples, I was robbed of everything, so now I don't know how to continue my journey, being not only without decent clothing, but also with poor means of subsistence./ Noble! I beg Your Excellency's highest goodness for moderate assistance in my extreme necessity, as I know from your fame that Your Excellency's generous heart relieves the afflicted, particularly civilized people. Therefore, I do not believe you would wish to abandon a fellow-man, who does not do this out of habit, but only in emergency./ Thus, I ask you to forgive this inconvenience and faithfully to kiss your hands humbly.]

22: Trueblood, “Byron's championship of political freedom”, in *The Byron Journal* IV (1976), p. 31.

23: Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of His Life*, London, Murray, 1866, p. 468.

that the police found the *Address* among Gigante's papers when they arrested him, and this claim was perpetuated by Rowland E. Prothero and Giovanna Foà.²⁴ For reasons equally opaque, Marchand takes a different view, asserting that Gigante was not an agent of the Neapolitan army, but a spy for the Papal Government. Unfortunately, Marchand does not explain how he reached this conclusion.²⁵

Meanwhile, in her recently-translated book, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, Teresa Guiccioli tried to pass off as a first-hand account her version of the story. Here we ought to note that, when Gigante arrived in Ravenna, Teresa was not living at Palazzo Guiccioli, but at her father's house in Filetto. Her version of the tale is notable for its sentimental Risorgimental Byronism:

Humane and open-handed as ever, Lord Byron replied to them: 'It may be that this man is a spy, as you suspect, but it could also be the case that he really is unlucky and has been robbed. I shall therefore help the *man* and *not the Carbonaro*.' He provided him with clothes, and gave him five hundred francs to enable him to regain his native land, as he was a Neapolitan.²⁶

Could one really make such a distinction between men and carbonari during the 1821 uprisings? Would Byron have been so casual about the difference? Frankly, did he care about Gigante at all? Probably not. Byron had learned a painful lesson in December 1820 when he was a near-eyewitness to the murder of Luigi Dal Pinto, captain of the Papal troops of Ravenna, just outside his front door.²⁷ It was not clear whether Dal Pinto had been a Papal officer killed by the carbonari, or a carbonaro officer killed by his carbonari comrades because he was working for the authorities.²⁸ Rescuing the body of Dal Pinto might not even have helped Byron's reputation with the carbonari. Ultimately, even at the highest echelons, it was impossible to distinguish between 'men', priests and carbonari.²⁹

Then Teresa affirms:

Having questioned him subsequently, Lord Byron was so convinced of this man's integrity, and justifiably so, that he entrusted him with his missive to the Neapolitan Government.

It is hard to believe Byron would have been convinced about Gigante's integrity. Indeed, one of the few certainties we can reliably extract from the bulky trial file is that Gigante was neither consistent nor trustworthy. He appears to have had numerous identities. He was variously a Neapolitan from Tunis, a Berber who "could not see himself in Berberia", and a self-styled Prussian soldier, called August Heimbach, from the invented town of Templaff (he could speak some German). As to his profession, he variously passed himself off as unemployed and a Professor of Philosophy, Medicine and Languages, although according to one witness he was completely illiterate.³⁰ He may have been a spy and investigator for the Neapolitan Government, or for the Church, or even for England. Gigante's identity was truly multi-faceted. Thus, we are entitled to be sceptical when Teresa assures us that Byron was "so convinced of this man's integrity, and justifiably so". She continues:

In order to avoid the Austrian army, Gigante (this was the man's name) hoped to reach Naples by crossing the Abruzzi mountains, but he was apprehended at Pesaro, and was said to have swallowed compromising papers lest they should fall into the hands of the police. It is more than likely, however, that the letter was seized, because the Austrian and Papal police grew even more hostile towards Lord Byron.³¹

The trial documentation never refers to Gigante trying to swallow paper. Indeed, the police found "compromising papers". These consisted of two tiny scraps with a few tantalizing names, evidently written in

24: LJ V, p. 595; FOÀ, *Lord Byron. Poeta e carbonaro. Studio critico-storico*, Florence, 1935, p. 186.

25: BLJ VII, p. 188n.

26: LBLI, pp. 276.

27: BLJ VII, pp. 245-52.

28: See Keats-Shelley Memorial House, Rome, Gay Papers, 36A; DEL CERRO, *Fra le Quinte della Storia*, pp. 74, 143; Pierantoni, *I carbonari dello Stato Pontificio*, vol. II, pp. 383-84.

29: This idea was shared by Gigante himself, who was heard by a witness to have said "preti e carbonari significassero la stessa cosa" ("priest and carbonari would mean the same thing"). A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, Series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 57.

30: A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, Series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 98; A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), N° 66, ff. 110v.-125r.

31: LBLI, pp. 276-77.

haste: Byron, Zambelli, Guiccioli and Savelli (a man from Senigallia from whom Gigante had apparently requested information about the local Carboneria³²). This list, together with the account of the witnesses, was considered incriminating enough to send Gigante to prison – and to persuade the authorities to put Byron under surveillance.³³ It is almost impossible, therefore, to believe that the *Address to the Neapolitan Government* – a far more incriminating document – was in Gigante’s possession. The trial papers fail to mention it, yet Prothero, Origo and Marchand, taking their cue from Teresa, all assert it was in Gigante’s possession, and was ingested.³⁴

There are at least four reasons to believe the *Address to the Neapolitan Government* was never given by Byron to Gigante. First, even though the *Address* is not clearly dated,³⁵ it must have been composed in October 1820, inspired by the creation of the Neapolitan Parliament. Byron did not know Gigante in October 1820. Therefore, Andrea Casadio’s suggestion that Byron might have sent the letter to Gigante in October 1820 (before he had even met him in Ravenna) cannot be accepted.³⁶ Secondly, as his passport makes clear, Gigante arrived in Ravenna between 14th and 16th March 1821, five months after the composition of the *Address*. It is highly improbable Byron that would have kept the *Address* secret in his drawer for such a long time and only decided to disclose it in a moment of extreme tension. The spring of 1821 was extremely fraught, not least because the Neapolitan army had just been beaten at Rieti. We would be wise to be sceptical about Teresa’s statement that Byron “was looking for an opportunity to send his letter to Naples”. It is also unlikely Byron would have entrusted such an important document to an unknown vagabond. Lastly, if the *Address* had indeed been given to Gigante, it would certainly have been found in Pesaro. The trial papers include a list of objects found in Gigante’s possession when he was searched by the police (“three *Doppias*, two Roman coins, two combs, and a fairly new, green silk umbrella with a cloth cover”³⁷), and there is no mention of anything resembling the *Address*.

The *Address* was probably meant to be entrusted – or ended up being entrusted – to the carbonaro messenger Dr Carlo Cicognani of Forlì. In August 1820, various meetings of the Low Romagna carbonari took place, including in Filetto, Lugo and Cesena. Ruggiero and Pietro Gamba were among the participants. Following these meetings Carlo Cicognani was selected to exchange instructions with the Neapolitan Government. The objective was to coordinate the uprisings between North and South of Italy. Cicognani was planning to meet General Pepe in Abruzzo and offer men and weapons. He also planned to distribute libels and raise four cities of the Papal States against the marching Austrians.³⁸ This hypothesis is further strengthened by knowledge that the mission of Cicognani to Naples was organised by Vincenzo Gallina, who was supposed to go in the first place.³⁹ Gallina was the leading carbonaro in Ravenna, and was a very close friend of Byron and the Gambas. Byron may even have considered joining the mission too: in October 1820 he had written to Teresa saying he would rather have offered his “patriotic services” in the North than be warming himself on the flanks of Mount Vesuvius.⁴⁰

Finally, is it possible to solve the mystery of Gigante? He may have been a simple deserter from the Napoleonic army. (After all, he confessed to being a deserter from Murat’s army at Leipzig.) After seven years of adventures and taking small jobs around Italy, he may by chance have become involved in tracking Austrian troops, using his language skills.⁴¹ He may indeed have been a roaming low-level carbonaro who, because of the carbonaro rules of mutual assistance and defence, was rescued by Byron after being robbed. At a time when the

32: A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, Series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 54 (minutes); A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), ff. 20, 22, 24, 26r.-27v.

33: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), N° 64, ff. 4, 13-15.

34: LJ V, p. 595; ORIGO, *The Last Attachment*, p. 226; BLJ VIII, p. 124n.

Marchand also believes that, if the letter had been intercepted, the Papal authorities would have been more rigorous and unforgiving with Byron. Marchand, “Lord Byron and Count Alborghetti”, p. 999.

35: The date might be unreadable. While Moore includes the *Address* among the letters dated December 1820 (MOORE, *Letters and Journals*, pp. 466-70), Marchand leaves a question mark next to “October 1820” (BLJ VII, pp. 187-88).

36: Casadio, “Two new letters from Byron’s stay in Ravenna”, p. 90

37: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), N° 11.

38: Del Cerro, *Dietro le Quinte della Storia*, p. 127; Pierantoni, *I carbonari dello Stato Pontificio*, vol. II, pp. 14-18, 223-24. It would be helpful in this regard to be able to bring to light the papers of Cicognani’s arrest and trial, which should exist somewhere between the Marches, Abruzzo and Rome.

39: Pierantoni, *I carbonari dello Stato Pontificio*, vol. II, pp. 119, 132, 144.

40: BLJ VII, p. 193.

41: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), N° 66, ff. 219-20, 365-67, 406-13, 417-22r., 424-30.

Austrian army had begun its invasion, and with all Italy shaking, the Papal authorities had a number of reasons to be suspicious of Gigante. From the trial papers, Gigante appears to have been stopped for three reasons. Firstly, he arrived in Senigallia with a “blank passport” and “without any particular indication”. This is curious given that, in the letter to the Cardinal, Byron stated that Gigante possessed a valid passport.⁴² Secondly, he tried to change his route to Naples by obtaining a visa for Loreto and Ascoli rather than for Ancona.⁴³ Thirdly, and perhaps most damningly, he had confessed to a witness to visiting Lord Byron:

A miglior schiarimento dell’oggetto di cui tratta il preg.mo foglio di V. S. Ill.ma N°43 P.S. ed avendo fatta una riflessione più precisa, debbo specificarle che l’Isp.e Davilla dopo l’Ave Maria del giorno 21. corrente per il Corso di questa Città, e precisamente avanti il Caffè Catena, mi esternò ch’Egli sospettava essere Giuseppe Giganti un’esploratore o dei napoletani o del Governo Inglese, facendomi rilevare che per la prima parte glie lo [*sic*] faceva credere la natura del rapporto dal Giganti ritenuto, e per la seconda il racconto fattogli dal Giganti di essere stato in Ravenna presso di Lord Byron. Certo che il Passaporto tenuto dal Giganti per essere senza veruna indicazione particolare, e per avere un visto per Ancona che voleva cambiare in altro per Loreto e che infine richiese per Ascoli, dava molto da sospettare, e perciò io ne ordinai all’Ispettore la Sorveglianza.⁴⁴

This dispatch, written by Mamiani to the Governor of Senigallia, provides further evidence of how much material on Byron remains to be discovered in the Italian archives. Interestingly, both of these men seem to know quite a lot about Byron and his political relevance. Perhaps this was why they thought Gigante might be a spy for the British government. However, the actual grounds for imprisonment were that Gigante had violated the terms of his exile from the Papal States, which was imposed the previous year when he had visited Ancona on a false passport claiming to be a Prussian soldier.⁴⁵ Other factors also counted against him. Gigante may have been a Muslim. He had never been baptized and confirmed.⁴⁶ He refused to give detailed information and, most damagingly, was caught telling several lies. Some of Gigante’s depositions were contradicted by witnesses and vice versa. The Papal authorities were probably further enraged by Gigante’s confession to a witness that his visa was signed by a carbonaro priest.⁴⁷ After examining all witnesses, the Papal authorities checked all the towns involved in the case (i.e. Ravenna, Lugo, Pesaro, Senigallia, Ancona) with the aim of finding members of secret carbonari sects.⁴⁸ This meant Byron was in trouble. However, as often happened in times of large, fear-fuelled persecutions, they could not find any incontrovertible evidence that proved Gigante was a key carbonaro. Despite all this, Gigante became one of the unfortunate scapegoats for the 1821 liberal uprisings – and perhaps for Byron himself.

Roaming individuals with a political conscience or background such as Gigante often knocked on Byron’s (or rather, Guiccioli’s) doors. In a separate case, Byron was revealed to have helped a sailor called Giuseppe Liard from Ferrara who was on his way to Ancona in the summer 1820.⁴⁹ Byron probably provided a point of contact for needy carbonari and liberals – a high percentage of the entire population – as they travelled

42: A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 54.

43: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), N° 66, f. 96.

44: A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 66.

[**Translation:** To clarify further the object of Your Illustrious Lordship’s document, N° 43 P.S., and upon due consideration, I have to specify that Inspector Davilla, after the Hail Mary of 21st March, along the main street, precisely opposite *Caffè Catena*, disclosed his suspicion about Giuseppe Giganti being an informer either for the Neapolitans or for the English Government. He pointed out to me that, in the first case, it was the nature of Giganti’s report, and in the second case, it was the story told by Giganti of having been in Ravenna to visit Lord Byron. Because the passport possessed by Giganti did not have any specific indication, and because he had a visa for Ancona that he wanted to change for one for Loreto first and then one for Ascoli, Giganti gave many reasons to be suspicious. Therefore, I ordered the Inspector to keep him under surveillance.]

45: By order of the Prussian Minister, the impostor was ordered out of the Papal States, as an alternative to ten years in jail. According to his own account, Gigante was then imprisoned as soon as he arrived in Naples because of anti-constitutional feeling. He had then embarked for Livorno, and, from there, had roamed as far as Lucca, Florence, Bologna, Imola, Ravenna, Pesaro and Senigallia.

46: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), ff. 341-57.

47: A.S.P., Sotto Direzione della Polizia di Senigallia, series III: Archivio Segreto, envelope 2, N° 54 (minutes).

48: A.S.R., Miscellanea di Carte Politiche Riservate, envelope 61, file 1973 (2045), ff. 105r.-106.

49: In December 1820, accused of being a carbonaro by the Austrian police, Liard confessed: “From Ancona I passed through Ravenna. In this city, from the gestures and words, I knew some men who were Carbonari. They did not ask me specific news about the situation in Naples, and I did not receive any assistance from them, having already been helped by that *English Prince*, about whom I have told you in my previous interrogation”. PIERANTONI, *I carbonari dello Stato Pontificio*, vol. I, pp. 463-64.

between the Marches, Romagna and Northern Italy. But these routes were also used by desperate people, living hand to mouth, with nothing left to believe in. Byron offered humanitarian assistance and helped maintain lines of communication. It was a role he would have found suitable: his contribution was significant but did not leave him too exposed.

Ultimately, the “Giant affair” does not tell us an awful lot about Byron, nor much about Carboneria. It does, however, reveal something else. It gives us a glimpse into a fragmented, incoherent and fearful world. It was a world made of feeble and delusional myths best understood when seen in their smallest scale. Gigante’s story shows us how easy it was, in a vulnerable country, dependent on foreigners, for isolated individual Italians to get caught up in the hope that something bigger and more noble – the triumph of liberty and independence, for example – might be just around the corner. His case also shows us how dangerous and imprudent it could be to act in light of that hope.