

ORLANDO FURIOSO (THE FRENZY OF ORLANDO)



*A Romantic Epic by
Ludovico Ariosto*

PART ONE



**TRANSLATED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
BARBARA REYNOLDS**



PENGUIN BOOKS

84

Forgetting that in dreams the things we see,
 Inspired by fear or longing, are inclined
 To be untrue, firmly convinced was he
 His lady was in danger, or repined
 In degradation and humility,
 And from the restless couch where he reclined
 He sprang and, taking shield and coat of mail,
 He mounted *Brigliadoro* and made trail.

85

He took no squire, nor, lest dishonour might
 Attach to his good name (one of the chief
 Concerns of chivalry), his coat of white
 And crimson quarterings, in the belief
 That dubious paths would beckon (as was right);
 But chose instead, in keeping with his grief,
 A coat of inky black, which he put on,
 A trophy he had from an emir won;

86

And silently, at midnight, stole away.
 No courtesy to Charlemagne he showed,
 Nor yet to *Brandimarte* did he say
 Farewell, the friend to whom great love he owed;
 But when, her golden locks in disarray,
 The Dawn had risen from the rich abode
 Of her *Tithonus*, darkness scattering,
 His absence was then noticed by the king.

87

With grave displeasure Charlemagne has seen
 His nephew has deserted him that night;
 The more so, as his duty would have been
 To stay and aid his uncle in his plight.
 The Emperor cannot contain his spleen,
 But utters condemnation of the knight,
 And threatens that if he does not return
 A bitter lesson he will make him learn.

88

But *Brandimarte* holds Orlando dear.
 Whether he hopes to bring him back again,
 Or he is moved to anger thus to hear
 The Emperor revile him, is not plain,
 But scarcely does he wait till night is near
 Before he follows in Orlando's train.
 No word to *Fiordiligi* does he say,
 Lest she should lovingly his plan gainsay.

89

She was his lady, whom he greatly loved.
 Rare were her charms and beautiful her face,
 And seldom from her company he moved,
 Such her endowments were of mind and grace.
 If now his absence an exception proved,
 It was because he hoped within a day's
 Duration to complete the task in hand.
 Events detained him longer than he planned.

90

After a month, when he had not returned,
 Fair *Fiordiligi* could no longer wait,
 Such was the flame of love with which she burned,
 But set off unescorted through the gate.
 In many lands thereafter she sojourned,
 And in due course her story I'll relate,
 And of them both will tell you more anon.
 Orlando's my concern from this point on.

91

His coat of arms he'd prudently replaced
 And to the city's barbican had ridden.
 And to the guard who vigilantly paced,
 (His world-renowned insignia being hidden)
 He whispered low: 'I am the Count.' In haste
 The captain let the drawbridge down as bidden.
 Where the besiegers were he rode straightway.
 What followed, in the following I'll say.

CANTO IX

1

Once Love has gained possession of a heart,
 What can this cruel traitor then not do?
 See how he tears Orlando's soul apart:
 So loyal once, now to his lord untrue,
 So wise, so versed in every noble art,
 And of the holy Church defender too,
 A victim now of passion unreturned,
 For God and king no longer he's concerned.

2

But I excuse him and rejoice to have
 In my defect companionship like his,
 For to such passion likewise I'm a slave,
 While my pursuit of goodness languid is.
 Attired in black as sombre as the grave,
 He leaves the army of the fleur-de-lis,
 And soon he finds, ere he has ridden far,
 The troops of Spain encamped and Africa,

3

Or rather, not encamped, because the rain
 Had driven them for cover here and there.
 In desultory groups about the plain
 They stand in tens, in trios, or a pair.
 Stretched on the ground in weariness or pain,
 Some sleep, some, leaning on their elbows, stare.
 Their lives Orlando easily could take,
 But not one move towards his sword will make.

4

For he is chivalrous, there's no denying.
 He'd never stoop to kill a man asleep.
 From end to end the camp he searches, trying
 Along the path of his dear love to keep.
 If any man's awake, he asks him, sighing,
 If he perchance has seen her and with deep
 Emotion he describes her, saying: 'Please
 Direct me if you can to where she is.'

5

When morning brought the scene to light once more,
 He searched the Moorish army through and through.
 The surcoat of an emir which he wore
 Made this less hazardous for him to do,
 And in his quest it helped him furthermore
 That other languages than French he knew.
 He spoke the Arab tongue so fluently
 Men deemed him born and bred in Tripoli.

6

Thus the encampment for three days he scoured,
 His only object being to find his love.
 Then other cities, other towns he toured,
 And not of France alone, but also of
 Auvergne and Gascony; from many-towered
 Fortresses to the last hamlet, creek and cove,
 And from Provence to Brittany he seeks,
 From Picard plains to Pyrenean peaks.

7

Between October and November, when
 The leafy covering of trees grows less,
 Till gradually all their limbs are seen
 As they stand shivering in nakedness,
 When birds, departing hence, fly southwards in
 Vast, serried flocks, the Count, in his distress,
 Began his search, nor all the winter through
 Did he desist, nor when the year was new.

40

And yet she left the bracelet to reward
The hospitable shepherd and his wife,
Who made them welcome at their humble board,
Who helped to save her dear Medoro's life,
Her gratitude thus wishing to record.
So, bidding then farewell to war and strife,
They took their leave, ascending the terrain
Which the fair land of France divides from Spain.

41

In Barcelona or Valencia
To sojourn for a day or two they planned,
Where vessels, bound for the Levant and far
Beyond, were newly fitted out and manned.
Gerona from the perpendicular
And the wide waters to behold, they stand,
Then clamber down the mountain slope straightway
And with the shore to leftwards, make their way

42

Towards Barcelona; not far had they gone
Before a madman lying on the shore,
His body caked with mud, they came upon.
Filthy he was, no pig was ever more
Encrusted; as a snarling cur will run
At strangers, with a maniacal roar,
He leapt towards them, menacing attack.
But let us to Marfisa now turn back.

43

Of Aquilant, Marfisa and the duke,
Grifone and the rest I now will tell.
In mortal peril as the tempest shook,
They were in peril from the sea as well.
More overwhelming yet, the storm would brook
No opposition to its angry will.
For three days now the hurricane has blown,
And no sign of abating has it shown.

44

Rigging and spars and superstructures crash
Beneath the elements' hostility,
And what remains the sailors hew and slash
To lighten ship, and cast into the sea.
Some to the compass with a lantern dash,
And scan a chart, their whereabouts to see.
With torches down below some sailors bold
Now test the bilge, and hope her timbers hold.

45

One man astern, and one upon the bow
Assess their hourly headway with a glass;
For they, by watching how the sand-grains flow,
Can judge the time and distance as they pass.
Then, gathering around their charts, they show
Their answers to this critical impasse.
When summoned by the captain, one and all
Collect 'midships, obedient to his call.

46

One says: 'We are off Limaçol, I think,
Where on the shoals we'll surely run aground.'
Another says: 'Off Tripoli we'll sink,
On jagged rocks: the waves our ship will pound.'
A third: 'We're lost; from truth we must not shrink:
This is Satalia,' and they sigh all round.
Each mariner says something different,
But by the same misgivings all are rent.

47

On the third day, with a yet fiercer spite,
The wind attacks, the sea more turgid grows.
A wave the foremast carries off with it,
Another helm and helmsman overthrows.
Of steel or marble is the breast which fright
Does not possess or now no terror knows.
Marfisa who till then felt no dismay
Did not deny that she knew fear that day.

96

And all that day among themselves they speak
Of nothing else but of that strange event:
How can it be that they were rendered weak
And helpless by a beam so violent?
And while the answer still in vain they seek,
They hear that Pinabello's life is spent;
So far they only know that he is dead,
For who has killed him nobody has said.

97

The valiant Bradamante had meanwhile
Caught Pinabello in a narrow pass.
Her sword a hundred times in scornful style
Pierced through his body-armour and cuirass.
She rid the world of filth and stench so vile,
Which France for miles around infected has,
Then left the wood, of this event the sole
Witness, and took the horse the villain stole.

98

She wanted to return at once to find
Ruggiero, but she did not know the way.
Up hill, down dale, and where the rivers wind
She seeks her dear Ruggiero all that day;
But Fortune to the lovers is unkind.
Their paths divergent and divided stay.
All those who in my story still find pleasure,
Pray hear the sequel later at your leisure.

CANTO XXIII

1

Let us help one another, if we can,
For rarely do good deeds go unrewarded.
Or if so, to be loved is better than
To suffer vengeance at the end, unguarded.
If anyone should harm his fellow-man,
The debt to pay will not be unregarded.
Men seek each other out, the proverb says,
The mountain, motionless, unchanging stays.

2

Take Pinabello as an instance now:
He has been brought for his iniquities
To a just end at last: consider how
Precise the balance of the payment is;
And God, who many times does not allow
The innocent to suffer, when He sees
A way to save them, as He saved the Maid,
Will ever to the blameless grant His aid.

3

That villain, Pinabello, really thought
The Maid was dead and buried where she lay.
He never dreamt he would be chased and caught
And for his evil-doing made to pay;
Nor did it, in his plight, avail him aught
That Altaripa was not far away:
His father's mountain fortress, which is near
The territory of the Ponthier.

4

The Count of Altaripa, old and frail,
Is named Anselmo; of his evil seed
That evil fruit was born, named Pinabel,
By friends deserted in his hour of need.
The Clairmont Maid (I told you in my tale)
Ended his worthless life with ease and speed.
No help he found in his extremity,
For all he shrieked and begged for clemency.

5

When she had slain that traitor-cavalier
Whom she had long desired to put to death,
She turned back where she hoped to find Ruggier,
But Fate, sending her down a winding path,
Did not consent to this; now here, now there,
Where branches twined above and underneath,
She wandered ever deeper through the wood,
While all our hemisphere in darkness stood.

6

Knowing no other place to spend the night,
On the young grass, beneath the boughs, she lies.
Sometimes she sleeps, or contemplates the sight
Of Jove or Saturn moving through the skies,
Or Mars or Venus watches with delight,
Or other planets follows with her eyes,
But whether she's awake or if she sleeps,
Ruggiero's image in her mind she keeps.

7

Many a sigh she heaves from her deep heart,
Long sighs of grief, compounded with remorse
That in her soul wrath played a greater part
Than love; her lack of foresight she deploras
Which from Ruggiero keeps her now apart:
'I should have blazed a trail upon my course
To help me to return to whence I came;
My eyes and memory are much to blame.'

8

Such words as these and many more she spoke;
Her self-reproaches gave her no relief.
Sighs from her bosom like a tempest broke;
Unending tears poured in a rain of grief.
At last the long-awaited dawn awoke.
The hours of dark for her had not been brief.
Taking her horse, which grazed not far away,
She mounted and rode forth to greet the day.

9

Quite soon she reached the exit of the wood,
Issuing thence just where, till recently,
Atlante's magic edifice had stood
Where she had long been tricked by wizardry.
She found Astolfo there in pensive mood.
The hippogriff he'd bridled easily,
But still he did not know whom he could trust
With Rabicano: find someone he must.

10

By chance it happened that the paladin,
Just at the moment when the Maid rode out,
Had doffed his helmet, and she thus had seen
And recognized her cousin beyond doubt.
Eager to clasp her long-lost kith and kin,
She rode to greet him with a joyful shout,
And spoke her name and raised her visor high,
That he might recognize her too thereby.

11

No one more suitable could he have found
Whom he could trust to see his horse well shod,
And put to pasture in good grazing-ground,
And give it back to him when Fate allowed,
Than Aymon's daughter, valiant and renowned:
It seemed to him she had been sent by God.
To see her always gave him joy, not least
That day, when need of her his joy increased.

12

When twice or thrice the cousins had embraced
 With warm affection, as between two brothers,
 And their adventures each to each had traced,
 Listening attentively to one another's,
 Astolfo said, 'More time I must not waste:
 This sky I must explore and many others',
 And, telling her what he desired to do,
 He showed the valiant Maid the horse which flew.

13

But it occasions her no great surprise
 To see the creature spread its mighty wings,
 For once before she saw it in the skies
 Bearing Atlante on its back; it brings
 New tears of grief to Bradamante's eyes
 As in her heart the recollection springs
 Of how it bore Ruggiero out of range
 Along a route so distant and so strange.

14

Astolfo said he would entrust to her
 His charger, Rabican, who ran so fast
 No arrow from the bow was speedier;
 Likewise his weapons to the Maid he passed,
 To Montalbano meanwhile to transfer,
 There to be kept till he should come at last
 To claim them once again; he had no need
 Of arms, he thought, upon the wingèd steed;

15

And, if he is to travel through the sky,
 He deems it wise to keep his luggage light.
 Both sword and horn he holds, though with its cry
 The horn would rescue him from any plight.
 The lance he hands the Maid was carried by
 The son of Galafrene once by right,
 That lance which every cavalier unseats
 And ignominiously thus defeats.

16

Mounted upon the hippogriff, the duke,
 Moving with caution, slowly tried the air.
 Then, gaining height and courage, off he took
 And in an instant was no longer there.
 Just so a ship, avoiding every rock,
 Towed by a pilot slowly and with care,
 Once having left behind both port and shore,
 Spreading all sails, the wind will run before.

17

When Bradamante saw the duke depart
 She suffered deep perplexity of mind.
 She knew not where to turn or where to start
 To carry out the task he had assigned.
 An ardent longing, gnawing at her heart,
 Is urging her to where she hopes to find
 Ruggiero, at the shrine where they arranged
 To meet, when they their loving vows exchanged.

18

While undecided Bradamante stands,
 She sees by chance a peasant drawing near,
 To whom she gives instructions and commands,
 Bidding him load the weapons then and there
 On Rabicano's back; he understands,
 And follows with two horses in the rear,
 For she had two: her charger and, as well,
 The horse she had reclaimed from Pinabel.

19

She planned to take the Vallombrosa road,
 For there she hoped once more to see her love;
 But still some hesitation yet she showed:
 Which was the shortest way and which would prove
 The most convenient? She understood
 The peasant had but little knowledge of
 The district round about and so she chose
 At random where she thought the abbey was.

20

Now here, now there, about the wood she turns.
 No one she meets of whom to ask the way
 To bring her to her love for whom she yearns.
 Leaving the wood at the ninth hour of day,
 Upon a hill a castle she discerns,
 But whose it is at first she cannot say;
 Then looks, and Montalbano she perceives,
 Where with her younger sons her mother lives.

21

When she is truly sure she knows the place,
 The sense of grief redoubles in her heart,
 For she will be discovered if she stays,
 Will no more be permitted to depart.
 Yet she so longs to see Ruggiero's face,
 The fires of love inflict so keen a smart,
 That she will die if what they planned, alas!
 Does not at Vallombrosa come to pass.

22

She ponders deeply; then away she rides,
 Turning her back on Montalbano, and
 Facing the abbey where her hope resides,
 Where love awaits her at her journey's end;
 But destiny, for good or ill, decides,
 Ere she departs from her paternal land,
 Alard, one of her brothers, she shall meet,
 Nor has she time to hide or to retreat.

23

Alardo recently his days had passed
 In finding billets for the horse and foot,
 Which at the Emperor Charlemagne's behest
 Were levied from the cities round about.
 Each clasped the other fondly, breast to breast.
 No joyful words of welcome were left out.
 Then, neck and neck, they ride and, turn by turn
 Exchanging news, to Montalban return.

24

The Maid re-entered her ancestral home,
 Where Beatrice, her mother, day and night
 Had wept, and messengers had sent to comb
 All France for news of her. Alas! now quite
 Insipid to the Maid and wearisome
 Are kisses and fond handclasps, right with right,
 Compared with her Ruggiero's fond embraces,
 Which on her soul have left eternal traces.

25

Unable now to go herself, she means
 To send an envoy in her name straightway
 To Vallombrosa, who what cause detains
 Her shall make known; and she will also pray
 Her love (if any need for prayer remains)
 For love of her to be baptized that day,
 Then, in due form, as they had both agreed,
 To ask her hand, that they may soon be wed.

26

By the same messenger she plans to send
 Ruggiero's charger, swift and beautiful.
 Dearly Ruggiero loved his equine friend,
 And it is true no finer horse in all
 The world, not if you searched from end to end
 The territories ruled by Charles de Gaulle,
 Or by the Saracen, could e'er be found,
 Save only those the valiant cousins owned.

27

The day her dear Ruggiero, rash and bold,
 Rose on the hippogriff into the sky,
 He left Frontino, as his horse is called;
 And Bradamante, who was standing by,
 Drew near, and on the charger's rein laid hold.
 To Montalbano, where she could rely
 Upon good stabling, she had sent him then.
 Now sleek and fat she found him once again.

28

First, all her handmaidens she set to work
 To ply their needles with a ready will.
 On snow-white silk, or on a silk as dark
 As wine, they traced with a consummate skill,
 As worthy as Arachne's of remark,
 In thread of finest gold a suitable
 And exquisite design; the saddle's bows
 And reins thus ornamented, she then chose

29

Of all their number, one, the daughter of
 Her nurse Callitrefia; she it was
 To whom she many times had told her love
 And whom for long she had regarded as
 Her confidante, whom she could trust above
 All others; to her, Bradamante says:
 'Of your discreet assistance I have need;
 No better envoy could I find indeed.

30

'Be my ambassador, Ippalca, pray'
 (Such was the damsel's name); and with great care
 She told the maiden how to find her way
 And bade her give her dearest love Ruggier
 His Bradamante's greetings, and then say
 It was no breach of faith detained her there;
 For Fortune, who with us more mighty is
 Than we ourselves, she had to blame for this.

31

She bids her mount upon a steed and take
 Frontino's costly bridle in her hand.
 If anyone she meets shall undertake
 To steal it from her, let him understand
 Whose horse it is; that single word will make
 All comers tremble, for throughout the land,
 In all the world, there is no valiant knight
 Who at that name does not succumb to fright.

32

She gave her much advice, and for her dear
 Charged her with messages time and again.
 To all of them Ippalca lent an ear,
 And then set out, holding Frontino's rein.
 Through roads and fields and forests, dark and drear,
 For many miles she journeyed, more than ten,
 And not a soul had she been troubled by
 Or questioned as to where she went, and why.

33

At noon, as she was riding down a hill
 Along a narrow path, she chanced to see
 The pagan Rodomonte (whom you will
 Recall), accoutred in full panoply,
 Led by a dwarf; glowering he looks his fill
 And swears by the angelic hierarchy
 That such a horse, so splendidly arrayed,
 No cavalier has owned, still less a maid.

34

Now, he had sworn an oath to take by force
 Whatever mount he should first come upon.
 This is the first; it is a splendid horse,
 He could not hope to find a better one.
 To take it from a damsel is a course
 He does not relish and would fain disown.
 He contemplates the steed in every limb
 And says, 'Ah! would his owner were with him!'

35

'Would that he were!' the fair Ippalca cried,
 'He would soon make you change your mind, I know;
 Greater than any cavaliers who ride,
 Than any pagans who on horseback go,
 Is he who owns this horse.' And he replied,
 'Who is it who all men surpasses so?'
 'Ruggiero' was the answer. 'In that case
 I'll take his horse and ride it in his place.

36

'If as you say he is so brave and strong
And far exceeds the fame of every knight,
This charger he can claim from me ere long,
And charge me for it too, if he thinks right.
Tell him I'm Rodomonte; if such wrong
He would avenge, he'll find me, for the light
Of my renown, which everywhere I go
Illumines me, my whereabouts will show.

37

'Where'er I pass, in mountains, valleys, plains,
I leave more devastation in my track
Than does a thunderbolt.' The gilded reins
He turns meanwhile, and on the charger's back
He leaps. Ippalca desolate remains.
Stung by despair, she flings at him no lack
Of menaces and insults and abuse.
He pays no heed, but up the mountain goes;

38

Then by the dwarf along a route he's led
To seek his lady-love and Mandricard.
Ippalca follows, calling on his head
The vengeance of the gods, and cursing hard.
What happened next will later on be said.
Here Turpin, whom I follow as my bard,
Makes a digression and returns again
Where the Maganza miscreant was slain.

39

Scarcely had Aymon's daughter left the scene
To hurry back (she thought) to her Ruggier,
When by another path arrived Zerbino
Who with the hateful hag had still to bear.
He greatly wondered who the knight had been
Whose body in the vale was lying there.
Being compassionate and merciful,
He felt a wave of pity fill his soul.

40

Count Pinabello on the ground lay dead,
For treachery his soul to Hell consigned.
Through countless wounds his life-blood had been shed,
As if a hundred weapons had combined
To bring him to his death; Zerbino sped
Along a recent trail, to try to find
The perpetrator of this homicide,
And to discover who it was that died.

41

He told Gabrina he would soon return
And bade her wait for him until he came.
She quickly scans the body to discern
If there are any gems which she can claim,
With which her ugly person to adorn;
To waste them on a corpse she deems a shame.
Gabrina is unequalled in her greed,
The daughter of an avaricious breed.

42

If there had been some hope of secrecy
She would, I vow, have stolen first of all
His richly brodered surcoat, fair to see,
And all the splendid arms he bore as well;
But that which can be hidden easily
She takes (to leave the rest for her is gall).
A costly belt with which the corpse is girt
She fastens round her waist beneath her skirt.

43

Soon afterwards Zerbino galloped back.
In vain he'd followed Bradamante's traces
Along a tortuous and tangled track,
Where branch with branch entwines and interlaces.
The daylight waned and ere the night grew black
They needs must flee these lonely, rocky places.
Some shelter now the prince sets out to find,
And leaves the vale, but not the hag, behind.

44

And soon they saw, about two miles away,
A castle on a lofty mountain height,
Called Altaripa; here they asked to stay
And both were granted lodging for the night.
But not for long in sweet repose they lay:
The sound of many folk in piteous plight,
Bitterly weeping, soon assaults their ears,
For all the castle's inmates are in tears.

45

Zerbino asks the reason; they explain
That Count Anselmo has received the news
That in a mountain pass his son lies slain.
Zerbino bows his head; lest they accuse
Him of the deed, he thinks it best to feign
Surprise, but in an instant he construes
The indications which he hears to mean
The son must be the body he has seen.

46

Amid the pomp of torches and of flares
The funeral bier is slowly borne along.
The noise of palm on palm affronts the stars;
Still louder swell the voices of the throng.
Their cheeks are inundated by their tears
As endless moisture from their eyes is wrung.
Of all the mourners there, the darkest brow
The grieving father's was that night, I vow.

47

While solemn preparations went ahead
For burial and rites of every sort
By means of which in early times the dead
Were honoured, as the chroniclers report,
A proclamation, from the father read,
Soon cut the people's lamentation short:
It promises a prize to anyone
Who knows the killer of Anselmo's son.

48

From mouth to mouth, from ear to ear, word passed
Of the fine sum of money offered by
The lord; it reached that harridan at last
Whose bestial ferocity could vie
With tigresses, and even bears surpassed.
She plans Zerbino's ruin: he must die -
For spite, or greed, or else the miscreant
Her inhumanity desires to vaunt.

49

Gabrina begged an audience of the lord.
With a preamble, meaning to mislead,
She opened (it was false in every word),
Then told him that Zerbino did the deed,
And from her waist she drew the belt she'd stored,
Which made the father's heart still further bleed.
The evidence and testimony of
The hateful harridan he takes as proof.

50

Weeping and raising both his hands on high,
He swore his son should not go unavenged.
The lodging where Zerbino slept near by
To be at once surrounded, he arranged.
Zerbino little dreamt that foes were nigh
Who clamoured for his blood as though deranged.
As unaware in his first sleep he rested,
The innocent Zerbino was arrested.

51

And that same night they cast him into jail,
In heavy chains and fettered hand and foot.
The sun had not withdrawn the night's dark veil
When sentence had been passed on him: they vote
That he shall be dismembered in the vale
Where the misdeed took place which they impute
To him; no further evidence being brought,
They deem conclusive what the father thought.

52

When fair Aurora streaks the morning sky
 With brilliant shafts of white and red and gold,
 Accompanied by shouts of 'He must die!',
 To pay for what he has not done, behold
 The prince; on foot, on horseback, wildly rushes by
 A foolish horde of people, young and old.
 The Scottish knight, his eyes fixed on the ground,
 Humiliated, on a nag is bound.

53

But God, Who often helps the innocent,
 As those who trust in Him have cause to say,
 Already in this case His aid has sent:
 Zerbino will not meet his death today.
 Orlando had arrived; his coming meant
 The prince would be released without delay.
 Orlando saw that motley crowd appear,
 Leading to death the hapless cavalier.

54

He was accompanied by the young maid
 Whom he had rescued from the mountain cave,
 The daughter of Galicia's king, betrayed
 And captured by the pirates as a slave
 (Her name was Isabella, as I said),
 When buffeted by storms, beneath the wave
 Her ship had sunk, she who Zerbino loved
 More than her very life, as she had proved.

55

Escorted by Orlando she had been,
 Beginning from the day he rescued her.
 When all those crowds of people she had seen,
 She asked the Count Orlando who they were.
 'I do not know,' he said, and to the plain
 Was gone, leaving her on the mountain there.
 Then, looking at Zerbino, at first sight
 He knew him for a valiant, noble knight;

56

And for what cause and whither he was led
 Thus bound and captive, he desired to know.
 The grieving cavalier had raised his head
 When he approached, and now he gave him so
 Convincing an account that all he said
 The Count believed and knew that it was true.
 He had no doubt about his innocence.
 Here was a case deserving his defence.

57

And when he learned that this had been decreed
 By Count Anselmo, Altaripa's lord,
 He knew that here was something wrong indeed,
 For naught but ill derived from every word
 And every action of that evil breed,
 Who the undying hatred had incurred
 Of all the Clairmonts, of untarnished fame,
 Whom to destroy was the Maganzans' aim.

58

'Untie that cavalier, you rabble!' cried
 The Count, drawing his sword on the riff-raff.
 'Who may this loud-mouthed braggart be?' replied
 A spokesman who appeared of sterner stuff;
 'No better spark, I think, could be applied,
 If he were flame and we were wax or chaff.'
 He moved towards the paladin of France.
 Orlando in response now couched his lance.

59

The shining armour of the reprobate,
 Which he that night had stolen from Zerbino,
 Did little to protect him from his fate
 In this encounter with the paladin.
 Orlando aimed his weapon true and straight
 At his right cheek; it did not pass within
 (The helm resisted), but the mighty stroke
 Sufficed to kill him, for his neck it broke.

60

The Count rode on, keeping his lance in rest,
 And in the self-same movement, as it seemed,
 He quickly ran another through the chest.
 He left his lance in him because he deemed
 That Durindana would now suit him best.
 Some heads he split in two, some torsos trimmed,
 And many throats he cut; and those who fled
 Totalled at least a hundred with the dead.

61

More than a third he kills; the rest he chases.
 He cuts, he thrusts, he slices, he truncates.
 Some scatter shields or helmets in their traces,
 Or fling away their spikes or other weights.
 One in the forest hides, another races
 To a cave. Only a few escape their fates.
 Orlando no compassion has that day.
 Every man jack of them he tries to slay.

62

Of twenty-and-a-hundred, eighty died
 (So forty fled, if Turpin has it right).
 At last Orlando to Zerbino's side
 Returns; the full extent of his delight
 When the young prince has seen him turn and ride,
 No poet e'er could sing, no pen could write.
 To honour him he'd gladly kiss the ground,
 But that upon the nag he is still bound.

63

And while Orlando, who untied his bonds,
 Assisted him to gather up his arms
 (The property with which a thief absconds
 To dust and ashes Fate sometimes transforms),
 Zerbino turned his eyes: a sight confounds
 His very reason – safe from all alarms,
 His love, seeing that now the fight had ended,
 In all her beauty from the hill descended.

64

And when Zerbino sees that lovely maid
 Whom he has loved so dearly for so long,
 That lovely damsel who had been betrayed,
 Who, he believed, was fathoms deep among
 The waves, for whom so many tears he shed,
 He freezes as though ice, his heart is wrung,
 His body shakes and trembles; then he burns,
 As cold at once to ardent longing turns.

65

Respect for Count Orlando kept him yet
 From taking her in his embrace; he thought
 (And by this thought the prince was much upset)
 Orlando was her lover, and this brought
 Distress and pain such as he'd ne'er forget,
 And all his former joy was turned to naught.
 To see her now another's is his dread,
 Greater than when he thought his love was dead.

66

It grieves him even more his love should be
 Beloved of one to whom so much he owes.
 He could not win her from him easily,
 Nor would the undertaking, if he chose
 To try, be honourable; although he
 To no one else would be prepared to lose
 His lady, yet his debt towards the Count
 Requires that he shall bravely bear the brunt.

67

They rode in silence to a crystal spring,
 Where they dismounted for a moment's ease.
 The Count drew off his helmet; the same thing
 Zerbino does, and Isabella sees
 Her lover face-to-face, and, marvelling,
 With sudden happiness her colour flees,
 Then floods her like a flower, drenched by rain,
 Which blooms in glory in the sun again.

68

She runs without delay, without restraint,
 To clasp her dear Zerbino round the neck.
 She cannot speak a word, her voice is faint;
 A flood of happy tears flows down her cheek.
 All this Orlando finds significant.
 No further indications need he seek,
 For clearly he has understood that he
 Zerbino is and no one else can be.

69

When Isabella finds her voice again,
 And with her cheeks still wet with happy tears,
 She tells her prince, dispelling all his pain,
 How Count Orlando honours and reveres
 A damsel in distress; he, who in vain
 The balance 'twixt his life and love compares
 (They are the same), has knelt down to adore
 One who two lives thus gives him in one hour.

70

The courteous exchanges oft renewed
 Between the knights had lasted for some time,
 When sudden clamour from the near-by wood,
 Of intertwining branches dark and grim,
 Brought to an end this pleasant interlude.
 Their helms they don and to their saddles climb.
 Scarce have they done so when a cavalier
 And with him, too, a damsel now appear.

71

The knight was Mandricardo, who set out
 In search of Count Orlando, to avenge
 Both Manilardo and Alzirdo, cut
 Down in their prime; nor did his purpose change.
 Steadfast, he had continued his pursuit,
 Whence nothing could deflect him or estrange,
 Not even she, whom with a shaft of oak
 Despite a hundred warriors he took.

72

The Saracen, in truth, does not yet know
 It is the Count to whom he now draws near,
 But all the signs and indications show
 This is a valiant, noble cavalier.
 Only the briefest glance did he bestow
 Upon Zerbino, but upon the Peer
 Of France he gazed and his insignia read.
 'You are the one I'm looking for,' he said.

73

'For ten days now,' he added, 'I have sought
 To follow in your tracks, so great the fame
 Of your exploit which a survivor brought
 When, gravely wounded, to our camp he came.
 He told how, single-handed, you had fought
 And killed or routed, like a raging flame,
 Not only all of Manilardo's men
 But all Alzirdo's too from Tremisen.'

74

'I was not slow to seek you when I heard,
 Eager to put your prowess to the test.
 I know that you are he, I have not erred,
 I know your surcoat and I know your crest.
 Even without this knowledge, undeterred,
 Your true identity I should have guessed.
 Your aspect, in a hundred, would declare
 Beyond a doubt: that cavalier you are.'

75

'It cannot be', Orlando said, 'denied
 That you must be a very valiant knight.
 Magnanimous desires do not reside
 In humble hearts; however, if the sight
 Of me is what you seek, let me inside
 And out display; so, I will now requite
 This valorous request of yours in full.
 Behold, my helmet from my head I pull.'

76

'When you have looked me squarely in the face,
With your next longing let me then comply;
That same desire which made you come in trace
Of me, I am disposed to satisfy,
And you shall then decide if I disgrace
This proud exterior you know me by.'
'Proceed', the pagan said, 'to the next stage:
My second longing let me now assuage.'

77

Meanwhile, from head to foot, most carefully,
Orlando raked the pagan with his glance.
He gazes at both flanks, but cannot see
(Nor yet upon the saddle-bows, by chance)
A sword or any short-arm weaponry.
He asks him what he uses if his lance
Should miss. 'You may be sure', the pagan said,
'E'en so I give good cause to be afraid.'

78

'I swore that I would never wear a sword
Till I won Durindana from the Count,
And every path since then I have explored
That with him I might settle my account.
And (if it interests you) I pledged my word
On the first day this helm enclosed my front,
Which, like these other arms my person bears,
Belonged to Hector, dead these thousand years.'

79

'I have them all, save for the sword alone.
Who stole it, when and how, I cannot say.
The paladin now bears it as his own,
Which makes him bold and brave in every way.
If I encounter him, that precious loan
With interest I will force him to repay.
I seek him everywhere, for I desire
To avenge the death of Agrican, my sire.'

80

'Orlando killed him by vile treachery,
For ne'er could he have slain him otherwise.'
Orlando could no longer silent be.
Loudly he cried: 'Whoever says so, lies!
But you have sought, and found, your destiny.
I am Orlando; just was the demise
Of Agrican. Let this sword be yours
If against mine your strength the more endures.'

81

'Although the sword belongs to me by right,
Let us contend for it as cavaliers.
Let neither of us use it in this fight,
But hang it on a tree; if it transpires
That I am captured, killed or put to flight,
Take Durindana freely, have no fear.'
And with these words, Orlando took the sword
And to a tree attached it with a cord.

82

Already both have galloped off, as far
Apart, perhaps, as half an arrow-fall.
Already both their gallant chargers spur,
Holding their slackened bridles scarce at all.
Already within striking-range they are;
The helmet's sights of each they both assail.
The lances at such impact break like ice.
A thousand splinters fly up in a trice.

83

One and the other lance perforce must break,
For neither combatant desires to yield.
The cavaliers their new positions take,
The remnants of their spears prepared to wield.
The cavaliers the arms of knights forsake.
Like yokels quarrelling about a field,
Or where an irrigation-ditch to fix,
They strive in bitter conflict, armed with sticks.

84

But neither stump withstands the first four blows,
Neither the frenzy of the fray resists.
The struggle on each side more heated grows.
Soon they have nothing left to use but fists.
One tears the other's tassets, or undoes
His rivets, while the other pulls and twists
The links of mail: no hammers heavier,
No pincers more tenacious, ever were.

85

How can the Saracen contrive to end
With honour to himself this fierce affray?
It would be madness further time to spend
In striking more such blows which ill repay.
The pagan grasps Orlando, not as friend
Embraces friend, but quite another way:
He hopes to crush the Count as Hercules
Once held Antaeus in his deadly squeeze.

86

He seizes him with force about the waist,
He pushes him and pulls him to and fro.
Unwary in his rage and frenzied haste,
He does not see what happens down below.
Orlando does not yield, nor does he waste
His strength; waiting to see how things will go,
He puts his hand out to the pagan's horse
And deftly slips its rein off in due course.

87

The Saracen attempts with all his might
To choke him or to lift him from his steed;
The Count Orlando keeps his knees clamped tight
And in his aim so well does he succeed,
The girth (of which the straps are fastened right
Beneath his charger's belly) is thence freed.
Orlando is unhorsed, but scarcely knows
It, still in stirrups, with his thighs held close.

88

The bang with which a sack of armour clangs
On falling to the ground, the Count now makes.
The other's horse, whose bridle dangling hangs,
Freed from the bit, into a gallop breaks,
And through the wood, where overhead there hangs
Dense foliage, a madcap course it takes.
Not heeding where it went and blind with fear,
It bore its rider wildly here and there.

89

When Doralice saw her lover gone,
And so precipitately, well she knew
That escort and defender she had none.
Spurring her palfrey, in his track she flew.
The Saracen in fury, still borne on,
Shouts at his charger, kicks and beats it too.
As though it were a man and not a beast,
He threatens it; it heeds him not the least.

90

The skittish animal, which often shied
For less good reason than it had that day,
Three miles had run, and, being terrified,
Would have run on but by a ditch its way
Was barred; though with no feather-bed supplied,
It welcomed horse and rider in as they
Pitched headlong on impacted earth and stone,
But Mandricardo did not break one bone.

91

And so the charger came to rest at last;
But how could it be guided, lacking rein?
The Tartar mounted, angry and nonplussed.
He did not relish clinging to its mane.
His Doralice, who had followed fast,
Perceiving his dilemma, thus began:
'Pray take my bridle, you have need of it.
My palfrey goes quite well without a bit.'

92

The pagan deemed it was unchivalrous
 To take advantage of this kindly thought;
 But Fortune to his need proved bounteous
 And in his path the vile Gabrina brought.
 She, having done her worst, the treacherous
 Old harridan, now her own safety sought,
 Like a she-wolf which hears from far away
 The hunt hallooing and the hounds that bay.

93

A youthful dress and ornaments she wore
 Which had been taken, as you will recall,
 From Pinabello's lady; what is more,
 She rode her palfrey also, which in all
 Its points was much too good for such a whore.
 Approaching, unaware what would befall,
 Before she knew, that evil harridan
 Was in the presence of the Saracen.

94

The style of dress in which the hag is clad
 Makes Doralice and her lover laugh.
 No monkey, no baboon, has ever had
 A face as ludicrous as hers by half.
 No chivalry the Saracen forbade:
 His plan is now to take the bridle off
 Her palfrey's head; he does so, then he routs
 The frightened horse with menaces and shouts.

95

It gallops through the wood; the evil crone
 Is carried helpless, nearly dead with fear.
 Up hill, down dale, the palfrey dashes on,
 At random, turning here, there, everywhere.
 But less concern for her I feel, I own,
 Than for Orlando, France's peerless Peer.
 His saddle he had easily repaired
 And now for further combat was prepared.

96

He paused, when on his charger once again,
 To see if Mandricardo would come back.
 When he had waited for a while in vain
 He planned to follow in the pagan's track.
 But first of the two lovers who remain
 (Since *savoir-faire* Orlando did not lack)
 With gracious courtesy he takes his leave.
 When he departs they cannot help but grieve.

97

Zerbino saw him go with deep regret,
 At his departure Isabella mourned.
 Despite their grief Orlando would not let
 Them keep him company, for, as he warned,
 The laws of knighthood they must not forget;
 For greatly would a cavalier be scorned
 Who, seeking battle with a deadly foe,
 Escorted by another knight should go.

98

If they should meet the Saracen before
 He does, he will remain, he bids them say,
 In the vicinity for three days more;
 But then he will depart and make his way
 Where Christians gather for the holy war,
 His homage to the Emperor to pay,
 And to defend the golden fleur-de-lis;
 Thus Mandricardo will know where he is.

99

And this they promised readily to do,
 And in all things comply with his command.
 Their pathway now divided into two.
 The cavaliers must part, as he had planned.
 Before he goes Orlando takes anew
 His trusty Durindana in his hand,
 Then, where he thinks the Saracen may be,
 He moves his gallant charger speedily.

100

In frenzied flight the pagan's horse had run
 Along the trackless wood of which I spoke.
 Orlando for two days had wandered on
 In vain; knowing no longer where to look,
 He reached a stream which clear as crystal shone.
 The verdant margins bordering the brook
 Are painted gay with Nature's vivid hues,
 And many stately trees the scene enclose.

101

A gentle breeze the noon was tempering
 To summer-weary cattle, which their hinds,
 Half-clad, to graze in water-meadows bring.
 His armour, helm and shield Orlando finds
 Less irksome as, to rest beside the spring,
 Amid this rustic scene he gently winds,
 Where torment lurks, more dread than I can say,
 That inauspicious and ill-omened day.

102

As he gazed round, some letters caught his eye,
 Carved on the trees which cast a grateful shade;
 He stopped and stared; at once he knew that by
 The hand of his beloved they were made.
 This was a place, among the many I
 Described, where with Medoro oft had strayed,
 Leaving the shepherd's house not far away,
 The lady who was Queen of all Cathay.

103

A hundred times the lovers' names are seen,
 'Angelica', 'Medoro', intertwined.
 Each letter is a knife which, sharp and keen,
 Pierces his bleeding heart; his tortured mind,
 Rejecting what it knows these carvings mean,
 A thousand explanations tries to find:
 Some other maiden may have left her mark,
 Writing 'Angelica' upon the bark.

104

And then he says: 'I know this writing well,
 I've seen and read it many times of yore.
 In fond imagination – who can tell? –
 Perhaps she calls me by this name, Medore.'
 By means of notions so improbable,
 And from the truth departing more and more,
 Although for comfort he has little scope,
 The unhappy Count contrives to build false hope.

105

But ever brighter burns and leaps afresh
 The flame of jealousy he would put out:
 As when a bird, entangled in a mesh
 Or lime, in vain will beat its wings about
 In frantic efforts; so in feverish
 Delusions, tighter yet the Count is caught.
 To where the mountain like an archway passed
 Across the crystal stream he came at last.

106

A grotto was thus formed, inside adorned
 By ivy tendrils and by vines which traced
 Their twisted paths; here from the sun which burned
 At noon, the happy pair would lie embraced,
 And all around, where'er the gaze was turned,
 Their names in lovers' knots they interlaced,
 With chalk or charcoal or a pointed knife,
 In token of their blissful married life.

107

Downcast, the Count dismounted here to rest,
 As he draws near the entrance to the cave,
 Words which Medoro wrote his glance arrest.
 Thanking the grotto for the joy it gave,
 These sentiments in verse he had expressed
 (The letters still a pristine freshness have),
 Which in his tongue are more elaborate,
 I think, than in our own I can translate:

108

'O happy plants, green grass and limpid stream,
 O cave so cool and generous of shade,
 Wherein Angelica of whom men dream,
 To whom so many hopeless suit have paid,
 Lay naked in these arms, pressed limb to limb,
 Where in sweet dalliance we oft delayed,
 Humble Medoro here his tribute pays,
 Though he has naught to offer you but praise,

109

'Begging all lovers who shall pass this way,
 Ladies or cavaliers or rustic swains,
 Or travellers whom choice or Fortune may
 Bring hither, here to ease a while their pains,
 To bless these plants, this cave, this stream and say:
 "O choir of nymphs sing here your sweetest strains,
 O sun and moon shine kindly on this place,
 These hallowed precincts let no flocks deface."

110

These verses were in Arabic, a tongue
 Which the Count knew as if it were his own.
 Of those which he had learnt when he was young,
 The language of the Arabs had been one.
 This saved him much dishonour when among
 The Saracens he found himself; but gone
 Are all such benefits he e'er might boast.
 His knowledge now he rues with bitter cost.

111

Three times, four times, six times, he read the script,
 Attempting still, unhappy wretch! in vain
 (For the true meaning he would not accept)
 To change the sense of what was clear and plain.
 Each time he read, an icy hand which gripped
 His heart caused him intolerable pain.
 Then motionless he stood, his eyes and mind
 Fixed on the stone, like stone inert and blind.

112

He seemed at last as if about to swoon,
 So nearly was he vanquished by his grief.
 Do not dismiss the truth of this too soon:
 I speak here from experience, in brief.
 Of all the sorrows which the pallid moon
 Surveys, this sorrow offers no relief.
 He stands dejected, brow and chin held low,
 His grief obstructs his words, no tears can flow.

113

A flood of sorrow in his bosom stays,
 And by its very impetus is checked:
 As we may sometimes notice in a vase,
 Broad-bellied in its shape and narrow-necked,
 When someone has too fast upturned the base,
 The liquid in the outlet will collect,
 And there, in too great haste to issue, stop,
 With difficulty dripping, drop by drop.

114

He comes then to himself, and thinks again
 How he might prove the truth to be untrue:
 Supposing somebody these words should feign
 To slander his beloved's name, or to
 Torment him with such jealousy, the pain
 Of which would bring him to his death, and who
 This dastardly deceit to perpetrate
 His lady's handwriting would imitate.

115

Upon such frail and slender premises
 His spirits he contrives somewhat to rouse,
 Then presses Brigliadoro with his knees,
 For now the sister of Apollo was
 Replacing him on high; and soon he sees
 Smoke rising from the chimneys of each house,
 He hears dogs bark, the homing cattle low,
 And for a lodging yonder means to go.

116

He wearily dismounts and gives his horse
 Into the care of a young stable lad.
 One takes his arms and one his golden spurs,
 And one to polish his cuirass is bade.
 This was the shepherd's house, wherein, of course,
 Medoro lay and his good fortune had.
 The Count requests a bed but will not eat.
 Sated with grief, he wants no other meat.

117

Longing at last into a sleep to fall,
 He is tormented by his pain the more.
 The hated writing is on every wall,
 On every window-frame, on every door.
 Tempted to ask the reason for it all,
 He hesitates, unwilling to be sure.
 The truth, too clear, he shrouds in mistiness,
 For thus he hopes that it will pain him less.

118

Now self-deception is of no avail:
 Informant he is both and questioner.
 The shepherd greatly wonders what can ail
 The knight, so full of grief he seems and care.
 He undertakes to tell the Count the tale
 Of the two lovers who had sojourned there,
 Which many folk with pleasure listened to
 And which he hopes the knight some good may do.

119

So first he tells him how a lovely maid
 Had begged him to convey Medoro home.
 With precious herbs his bleeding she had stayed.
 In a few days his wounds had healed; but from
 His health a deeper wound in her Love made.
 A spark an eager flame had soon become,
 Which now consumed her with so fierce a fire,
 She yearned for him with amorous desire.

120

Regardless of her royal status as
 The daughter of the greatest of all kings
 Of the Levant, although Medoro has
 The rank of common soldier, yet she clings
 To him and wants him only for her spouse.
 When to its end the narrative he brings,
 The shepherd shows the Count the precious gem
 Which fair Angelica had given him.

121

This was the axe which at one final blow
 His head then severed from Orlando's neck,
 For Love the Slaughterer was sated now
 With endless batterings; though at this wreck
 Of all his hopes Orlando, not to show
 His grief, all signs of it attempts to check,
 Yet willy-nilly from his mouth and eyes
 Sorrow comes flooding forth in tears and sighs.

122

When he can give his sorrow fuller rein,
 Fleeing all others, in his room alone,
 The tears run streaming down his cheeks like rain.
 Sigh follows upon sigh and groan on groan.
 Fumbling and groping for his bed, in vain
 He seeks relief; harder than any stone,
 Sharper than nettles, is that downy nest
 Whereon Orlando never can find rest.

123

Then in his travail suddenly he knows
 That in this very bed on which he lies
 His love has lain, and often, in the close
 Embrace that nothing of herself denies.
 No less abhorrence now Orlando shows
 And no less quickly from that couch he flies
 Than we may see a startled peasant leap
 Who spies a snake where he lay down to sleep.

124

The bed, the house, the shepherd he now hated.
 His one desire was but to get away.
 Not for the moon, not for the dawn he waited,
 Not for the streaks of white which herald day.
 His arms, his horse he first appropriated
 And where the forest's heart of darkness lay
 Shrouded in densest foliage, he rode
 And to his grief gave vent in solitude.

125

His tears, his groans, his sobbings never cease.
 All night, all day, in anguish and in pain,
 Fleeing all habitats, he finds no peace.
 Lying unsheltered on the hard terrain,
 He marvels at the fount his eyes release,
 That such a living spring they should contain.
 His sighing too an endless rhythm keeps
 And to himself he muses as he weeps.

126

'These are no longer tears I weep,' he said,
 'Streaming so copiously from my eyes.
 The tears were insufficient which I shed
 To stay my grief, which all relief defies.
 The vital humours, now by passion sped,
 Through secret conduits to my orbs arise,
 And thence these now exude, and with them pours
 My life, thus ebbing to its final hours.

127

'These tokens which my torment manifest,
 These are not sighs, no sighs resemble these,
 For veritable sighs allow some rest.
 But when these gusts come forth I feel no ease,
 For Love, who burns my heart within my breast,
 Fanning it with his wings, creates this breeze.
 Love, by what miracle do you contrive
 To burn my heart and keep it yet alive?

128

'I am not he, I am not he I seem.
 He who Orlando was is dead and gone,
 Slain by his lady, so untrue to him,
 By her ingratitude, alas! undone.
 I am his spirit whom the Fates condemn
 To suffer in this dread infernal zone,
 No body, but a shadow which must rove,
 A warning to all those who trust in love.'

129

He wandered through the forest all that night,
 At length his cruel destiny decreed,
 At the first glimmerings of morning light,
 He should return to where Medoro's screed
 Was sculpted on the rock; and at the sight
 Of his great wrongs, blazoned for all to read,
 No dram of all his blood was not on fire
 With hatred, fury, rage and wrath and ire.

130

Drawing his sword, he slashed the offending rock,
 And heavenwards the splintered fragments flew.
 The cave, the trees, each bole or stem or stock
 He hacked, whereon those names still met his view.
 From that day forth no shepherd with his flock
 Their grateful shade or pleasant coolness knew.
 The very spring, so crystalline and pure,
 From onslaught such as this was scarce secure.

131

With tree-trunks, branches, stones, and clods of earth
 He sullies the fair waters of the stream,
 Choking and clouding them for all he's worth.
 From top to bottom, murky now and dim,
 For ever fouled the fount which gave them birth,
 Their purity has vanished, thanks to him.
 Wearied at length, upon the ground he lies,
 His force, but not his fury, spent, and sighs.

132

Soaked with his sweat, he falls upon the grass
 And gazes at the sky without a word.
 He neither sleeps nor eats; though three days pass,
 Three times the dark descends, he has not stirred.
 His grief so swells, his sorrows so amass
 That madness clouds him, in which long he erred.
 On the fourth day, by fury roused once more,
 The mail and armour from his back he tore.

133

His shield and helmet lie, one here, one there,
 His hauberk somewhere else; all through the wood
 His scattered arms mute testimony bear
 To his unhinged and catastrophic mood.
 Then next his clothing he begins to tear,
 Laying his matted paunch and torso nude,
 And that horrendous madness then began,
 Not fully to be grasped by any man.

134

His rage and fury mount to such a pitch
 They obfuscate and darken all his senses.
 Even his sword he leaves behind, from which
 It may be judged the mist of madness dense is.
 But neither sword nor scramasaxe so rich
 A crop could scythe; unarmed his strength immense is.
 Barehanded, he uproots at the first blow
 A tall and noble pine and lays it low.

135

And other pines, after the first, he pulls,
 As if so many fennel-stalks they were.
 Tall oak and seasoned elm likewise he culls,
 And beech and mountain ash and larch and fir.
 As a bird-catcher who, before he gulls
 His prey with cunning nets, the ground will clear
 Of stubble, nettles, reeds, so now the Count
 Rips forests up as if of no account.

136

The shepherds, who have heard the fearful sound,
 Anticipating some calamity,
 Their sheep abandon, scattered all around,
 And at top speed come running out to see.
 But if this point today I go beyond,
 Too tedious perhaps my tale will be,
 And I would rather now cut short my song
 Than weary you by making it too long.

CANTO XXIV

I

Who in Love's snare has stepped, let him recoil
Ere round his wings the cunning meshes close;
For what is love but madness after all,
As every wise man in the wide world knows?
Though it is true not everyone may fall
Into Orlando's state, his frenzy shows
What perils lurk; what sign is there more plain
Than self-destruction, of a mind insane?

2

The various effects which from love spring
By one same madness are brought into play.
It is a wood of error, menacing,
Where travellers perforce must lose their way;
One here, one there, it comes to the same thing.
To sum the matter up, then, I would say:
Who in old age the dupe of love remains
Deserving is of fetters and of chains.

3

You might well say: 'My friend, you indicate
The faults of others; yours you do not see.'
But I reply: 'I see the matter straight
In this brief moment of lucidity,
And I intend (if it is not too late)
To quit the dance and seek tranquillity.
And yet I fear my vow I cannot keep:
In me the malady has gone too deep.'

4

My lord, in my last canto I had said
That Count Orlando, of his wits bereft,
Scattered his armour and his clothing shed,
Even his trusty Durindana left.
He tore up trees, and noise to wake the dead
Resounded as caves, caverns, rocks he cleft.
To meet their fate or to atone for sin,
Shepherds ran forth, astonished by the din.

5

First, from far off they watch the madman show
A strength unheard-of; next, they draw too near,
Then turn to run, but where they do not know,
As happens when a man is gripped by fear.
The madman to pursue them is not slow.
He seizes one and is as quick to tear
His head off as a man might easily
Pluck blossom or an apple from a tree.

6

He swings the heavy body by one leg,
Using it as a club to beat the rest.
Two of them have no time or chance to beg
For mercy: until doomsday they will rest.
The footsteps of the others do not drag.
Of policies, they judge retreat is best.
The madman is diverted from the chase
And turns upon the flocks, which he now slays.

7

The peasants who were working in the fields,
Leaving their scythes, their mattocks and their ploughs,
Clamber to roof-tops or whatever yields
A vantage-point (not trusting to the boughs
Of trees) and watch the madman as he wields
His grisly weapon, or kills oxen, cows,
Tearing the hapless creatures limb from limb –
And swift indeed are those which flee from him.

8

A pandemonium one might have heard
Reverberate from every near-by town,
Of voices, horns and rustic trumpets, blurred
By bells which every other clamour drown.
With bows and clubs and spikes and slings, a herd,
About a thousand, from the hills leaps down,
While from the valleys many hundreds vault,
Resolved to take the madman by assault.

9

As when a wave rolls gently to the shore,
While playfully the south wind blows at first,
And as a second follows and then more,
Stronger and stronger, till at last they burst
With all their volume, and the sandy floor
Is lashed as though the sea would do its worst,
So now against Orlando mounts and swells
The hostile crowd which pours from hills and dells.

10

He slaughtered ten, and then another ten,
Who in disorder fell beneath his hand,
And from this demonstration it was plain
That safer farther off it was to stand.
His body none can injure and in vain
Their weapons strike him; God on high had planned
That he should be preserved inviolate,
Defender of the Faith decreed by fate.

11

Orlando ran a mortal risk that day
(Had he been capable of death, that is).
Just what it meant to throw his sword away
And then, unarmed, join in hostilities,
He would have learned, and what the price to pay.
The crowd retreats, and when Orlando sees
That nobody his movements now opposes,
He strides towards a little group of houses.

12

There not a single soul is to be found,
 For all in terror of their lives have fled;
 But humble viands everywhere abound
 Which rustic folk find fitting for their need.
 Unable to distinguish, I'll be bound,
 Between the vilest acorns and good bread,
 He fell upon whatever food he saw,
 And ate it ravenously, cooked or raw.

13

Then, as he roamed about the countryside,
 He hunted animals, and humans too.
 The nimble-footed creatures, terrified,
 Goats, stags and does in vain before him flew.
 With bears and with wild boars his strength he tried,
 And many with his naked hands he slew;
 Their flesh, quite raw, and innards, all complete,
 With savage relish he would often eat.

14

Here, there, up, down, the length and breadth of France
 He goes, till to a bridge he comes one day.
 Beneath, a river flows, of broad expanse;
 Steep, rocky banks its swirling waters stay.
 Beside it is a tower, whence the glance
 The land in all directions can survey.
 But what he did there you will learn elsewhere,
 For now about Zerbino you must hear.

15

After Orlando left, first for a while
 Zerbino waited; then he took the route
 Marked by the paladin; in leisured style
 He rode, more at an amble than a trot.
 He had not gone, I think, above a mile
 Or two when he observed, bound hand and foot,
 A knight upon a nag; and on each side,
 Like guards, two cavaliers in armour ride.

16

Zerbino recognized the prisoner,
 And so did Isabella, from close to,
 For he was Odorico, in whose care
 She had been placed. A wolf a tender ewe-
 Lamb would protect as well, but trustier
 Zerbino thought him and more staunch and true
 Than all his friends, and so believed he could
 Rely on him to guard her maidenhood.

17

Exactly what had happened, Isabel
 Was vividly describing to him then:
 How, when the vessel sank, as it befell,
 She had survived, together with three men,
 How Odorico tried to force her will,
 How she was carried to the pirates' den.
 She had not finished all she had to say
 Before they met the villain on their way.

18

The two who lead him captive know the truth.
 They recognize the damsel instantly.
 The knight beside her must be he who's both
 Her lover and their lord; and when they see
 The markings on his shield, they'd take their oath
 Those ancient signs betoken royalty.
 When they come near enough to see his face,
 They have no doubt at all about the case.

19

Dismounting from their steeds and kneeling down,
 They clasp him where the humble clasp the great.
 They bare their heads and, visible from crown
 To chin, for his acknowledgement they wait.
 Zerbino, staring with a puzzled frown,
 Beholds thus paying homage at his feet
 Corebo and Almonio, whom he
 Had sent to bear his lady company.

20

Almonio spoke: 'Since it has been God's will
That Isabella should be here with you,
I understand full well, my lord, the ill
Report I have to give you is not new,
Of how this felon sought to wreak his will,
Whom as a prisoner between us two,
Fettered upon a nag, you now behold,
For she who suffered must all that have told.

21

'How by this traitor I was tricked when he
Despatched me off to La Rochelle, you know,
And how Corebo, for his loyalty,
Was wounded by what seemed a fatal blow;
But what occurred when I returned to see
Your lady vanished and my friend struck low,
She could not tell you, for she was not there;
So now to tell you this, falls to my share.

22

'From La Rochelle I galloped back again,
To bring the horses I was quick to find.
I gazed ahead, intent on the terrain,
Eager for signs of those I'd left behind.
Onward I ride, I look about in vain,
I reach the shore, now here, now there I wind;
Of my companions I can see no trace,
Save that a trail of footsteps marks the place.

23

'I followed them; they led me to a wood,
Fearsome and dark. I'd gone but a short way
When from a sound of groans I understood
That therein someone sorely wounded lay:
It was Corebo, weak from loss of blood.
"What has become of Isabel?" I say,
"Of Odorico?" When the truth I knew,
After the traitor through the woods I flew.

24

'In vain all the surroundings I explore,
Wherever labyrinthine pathways lead.
Then I return to where Corebo's gore
Has stained the earth around so deep a red
That, had he lingered there a little more,
A grave he would have needed, not a bed,
And priests to bury him with solemn prayer,
Having long passed beyond a doctor's care.

25

'Help came and he was borne to La Rochelle.
The landlord of an inn, who was my friend,
Summoned a surgeon, old and of great skill.
The wounds in a short time began to mend.
Clad in new arms and on new steeds as well,
We scoured the countryside from end to end
In search of Odorico; in Biscay
We came upon him at the court one day.

26

'The justice of the king (who a free field
Allows), the truth, which the Almighty sees,
And Fortune also, who is wont to yield
The victory wherever she may please,
So aid me that the traitor scarce can wield
His lance against me; and I captive seize
The felon. When the king his crime had heard
He let me deal with him as I preferred.

27

'I had no wish to sentence him untried,
But, as you see, to bring him to you, chained.
It is for you to judge him and decide
If he deserves to die or be detained.
News that you rallied to King Charles's side
Brought me from Spain to seek you in this land.
Now I thank God, who led me to this place,
Where I least hoped to meet you face to face.

28

'I thank Him also that your Isabel
(I know not how) is safely in your care,
Of whom good tidings, after what befell,
And at whose hands, I never thought to hear.'
To everything Almonio has to tell
Zerbino listens, fixing with a stare
The villain, Odorico, less in hate
Than sorrow for their friendship, and regret.

29

And when Almonio his story ends,
Zerbino stands perplexed for a long while:
That one whom least of all his many friends
He would suspect of treachery and guile
Should have betrayed him for his lustful ends,
With what once was he fails to reconcile.
He sighs and, from his stupor coming to,
He asks the captive if these things are true.

30

The traitor fell at once upon his knees
And said these specious words in his defence:
'My lord, each one of us a sinner is,
Between the good and bad the difference
Is only that the latter is with ease
Defeated by desire and then repents.
The other takes up arms against the foe,
But he too by one stronger is brought low.

31

'If you had trusted me to guard a fort
And I had yielded at the first attack,
Hoisting, without defence of any sort,
The banners of the foe, you would not lack,
On hearing tidings of such ill report,
Terms of abuse to heap upon my back;
But if I long resisted, I am sure
My fame and glory would for long endure.

32

'The more redoubtable the enemy,
The more acceptable is the excuse
Of him who has to cede the victory;
And, like a fortress ringed about with foes,
I knew that I must guard my loyalty;
And so, with all the prudence I could use,
With heart and soul I tried, but to my shame
My passion my resistance overcame.'

33

Thus Odorico spoke, and added then
Still more which it were lengthy to relate,
Showing how sharp his sufferings had been,
How fierce the lash, how agonized his state.
If ever prayers the wrath of angry men,
If ever humble words the heart placate,
Then surely Odorico must succeed,
So skilfully and ably can he plead.

34

Revenge for such an injury to take –
'T'wixt yes and no Zerbino's will is hung,
And difficult he finds the choice to make:
Only the felon's death would right the wrong,
And yet he hesitates for friendship's sake,
That bond which had united them so long.
The water of compassion in his heart
Quenches his rage and counsels mercy's part.

35

And while Zerbino hesitated still
Whether to take as captive or to free,
Whether to castigate, or yet to kill
The miscreant for his disloyalty,
The horse which Mandricardo, as you will
Recall, had left unbridled, rapidly
Approached, bearing the hag who not long since
Contrived to bring such peril to the prince.

36

The palfrey, hearing hoofs, had pricked its ears
 And galloped at full speed across the plain
 To join its kind; the harridan, in tears,
 Shrieked all the while for help, but shrieked in vain.
 Zerbino, when he sees her, offers prayers
 Of thanks that Heaven so benign has been
 As to deliver in his hands those two:
 For them alone hatred from him was due.

37

Zerbino first detains the evil crone
 Till he decides what he will do with her.
 Cut off her nose and both her ears is one
 Good method evil-doers to deter;
 To let the vultures pick clean every bone
 Would be another: which does he prefer?
 On punishments of many kinds he muses
 And one solution finally he chooses.

38

He turned to his companions and declared:
 'I am content to let the traitor live;
 Although he does not merit to be spared,
 Yet neither does he merit to receive
 The final penalty; I am prepared
 To let him be released – this boon I give.
 I see his error was the fault of love
 And this the guilt in great part must remove.

39

'For love has many times turned upside down
 A mind more stable and more sound than his.
 Greater excess is laid to love's renown
 And greater outrage than our injuries.
 Not Odorico is to blame; I own
 I am the culprit, mine the error is.
 I should be punished, having been so blind.
 That fire burns straw I should have borne in mind.'

40

Then, fixing Odorico with his eye,
 'The penalty for your misdeed shall be
 That for a year you shall be followed by
 This agèd crone and on your company'
 (He said) 'both night and day she shall rely,
 At every hour, wherever you may be;
 And with your very life you must defend her
 Against whoever threatens to offend her.

41

'And I decree that you shall undertake,
 At her command, with whomso'er may chance,
 To engage in mortal strife; and you shall make
 From town to town this quest throughout all France.'
 Such was Zerbino's judgement; for the sake
 Of mercy he had spared the miscreant's
 Unworthy life, but dug a ditch too deep.
 Across it (save by luck) he'd never leap.

42

The evil crone had injured and betrayed
 So many men and women in her time,
 Whoever at her side a journey made
 Would meet with challengers in every clime.
 Thus equally they both would be repaid,
 She for her evil deeds, he for the crime
 Of having pledged to champion the wrong,
 Whence he was bound to meet his death ere long.

43

Then Prince Zerbino made the traitor swear
 A sacred oath that he would keep the pact;
 But if he should break faith, let him beware,
 For if by any chance Zerbino tracked
 Him down, no pleas this time would make him spare
 His life: a cruel death let him expect.
 Then to Corebo and Almonio
 Zerbino turned, and bade them let him go.

44

Reluctantly obeying, they untied
 The traitor finally, but not in haste,
 For both of them were vexed and mortified
 So sweet a moment of revenge to waste.
 Then through the forest the two villains ride,
 Passing together from the scene at last.
 What next befell them, Turpin does not say;
 I read it in another book one day.

45

I will not tell you who the author is.
 He writes that ere a single day went by,
 Breaking his oath, to rid himself of his
 Encumbrance, quickly managing to tie
 A rope about her neck with expertise,
 He left her dangling from an elm near by;
 And a year thence (the place I do not know)
 He met the same death from Almonio.

46

Zerbino, who was following the track
 Of great Orlando, which he must not lose,
 Now saw the chance to send a message back
 To reassure his troops; for this he chose
 Almonio and gave him too (I lack
 The time to quote his words) the latest news.
 Corebo with Almonio he sends
 And thus he parts with both his faithful friends.

47

His love for the brave paladin was great
 And Isabella loved him too no less,
 And for this reason he resolved to wait,
 Eager to hear the tale of his success
 Against the Tartar knight, whom soon or late
 He would be bound to meet; he'd soon redress
 The outrage of being hoisted off his horse.
 Zerbino lets the three days run their course.

48

During this time for which Orlando bade
 Zerbino wait till Mandricard should come,
 Along no pathway and along no glade
 The Count had travelled did he fail to roam,
 And he arrived at last beneath the shade
 Of trees on which the faithless damsel, whom
 Orlando loved, inscribed Medoro's name,
 And to the broken cave and fount he came.

49

Glimpsing an object shining on the ground,
 He recognized it as the Count's cuirass;
 And next, a little farther off, he found
 A helmet (not Almonte's, but of brass).
 Then, startled by an unexpected sound
 Of whinnying, he sees, cropping the grass,
 Its bridle from its saddle hanging loose,
 The famous Briadoro he well knows.

50

He searched for Durindana through the wood.
 He found it lying there, without its sheath;
 And next he saw Orlando's surcoat, strewed
 In countless pieces; both the lovers, with
 Their faces woebegone and pensive, stood
 Amazed; these did not seem the signs of death.
 Over all possibilities they ranged,
 Save that Orlando's wits had been deranged.

51

They might have thought Orlando had been slain
 But for the fact that nowhere could they see
 A drop of blood nor any gruesome stain.
 Along the stream a shepherd hurriedly
 Approached; pale and distraught, he had seen plain
 The tokens of the victim's malady:
 How he had torn his clothing, strewn his arms,
 Killed shepherds with their flocks, and ravaged farms.

52

Zerbino, who interrogates the man,
 Receives a true account of what has passed.
 He tries to credit it, but scarcely can,
 Though everywhere the signs are manifest.
 Dismounting from his charger, he began,
 Filled with compassion, tearful and downcast,
 To gather up the remnants where they lay,
 Scattered some here, some there, as best he may.

53

And Isabella leaves her palfrey too
 And gathers all the weapons in one pile.
 As they are thus engaged, a damsel who
 Is tearful and forlorn draws near meanwhile.
 If you should ask to what her grief is due,
 And who it is who sorrows in such style,
 Her name is Fiordiligi, I'd reply;
 She searches for her loved one low and high.

54

When Brandimarte left the city gate
 Without a word to Charles or to his love,
 She waited for him some six months or eight.
 Resolved, when he did not return, to rove
 Through France from coast to coast to learn his fate,
 The Alps, the Pyrenees, below, above,
 She searched, looking in every place except
 The one where as a captive he was kept.

55

If she had visited that hostelry
 Created by Atlante's magic spell,
 She would have seen him wandering aimlessly,
 Gradasso, Ferraù, the Maid as well,
 Ruggiero and Orlando, even he;
 But when Astolfo blew that terrible
 Loud blast, to Paris Brandimart returned,
 But this, fair Fiordiligi had not learned.

56

As I have said, she happened now by chance
 On those two lovers in their deep distress.
 She recognized Orlando's arms at once
 And Briigliadoro too, left riderless,
 His bridle hanging free; and at one glance
 She understands the signs, for she no less
 Has heard the story from the shepherd lad
 Of how he watched Orlando running mad.

57

Zerbino gathers all the weapons there
 And hangs them up in order on a pine.
 On the green bark this legend, brief and clear,
 He writes: 'Arms of Orlando, paladin',
 By this inscription meaning to deter
 Whoever saw the splendid trophy shine,
 As though to say: 'Hands off, all who pass by,
 Unless Orlando's strength you wish to try.'

58

His pious labours being completed then,
 Zerbino was preparing to remount
 When Mandricardo came upon the scene.
 He asks Zerbino for a full account:
 What does the splendour on the pine-tree mean?
 The Prince relates the truth about the Count.
 The pagan monarch, wholly undeterred,
 In joyful triumph takes Orlando's sword.

59

He cried: 'This, nobody can take away.
 Here on this spot I seize it rightfully,
 For I laid claim to it before today,
 And will again, wherever it may be.
 Orlando feigns his wits have gone astray,
 Rather than stand and hold his ground with me.
 If thus he thinks he can excuse his fright,
 That is no reason to forgo my right.'

60

Zerbino shouted, 'Do not touch that sword,
Or think that you can seize it undefied.
The blade of Hector does not well accord
With such a thief as you!' At once they ride
Against each other with no further word,
Two paragons of prowess, each well-tried.
The wood already echoes with the din,
Almost the very moment they begin.

61

Twisting and turning like a living flame,
Zerbino dodged where Durindana fell.
As nimble as a doe his horse became,
Leaping now here, now there; and it is well
It yielded not one jot in such a game,
Else were the prince despatched at once to dwell
Among his fellow-sufferers in love
Whose mingling shadows haunt the myrtle-grove.

62

Just as a hound will rush towards the boar
Which in the fields has wandered from its herd,
And round it run in circles, ever more,
Until to a mistake the prey is lured,
So, as the weapon flashed above him or
Below him, Prince Zerbino never erred,
Striving his best to see, in all the strife,
How he might save both honour and his life.

63

But when the pagan plied his sword, the sound
With whining, whistling winds might well compare
Which through the mountain peaks in March resound,
Or seize the forest by its tangled hair,
Bending the tree-tops down to kiss the ground,
And whirling broken branches through the air.
Although the prince avoided many blows,
One finally was sure to come too close.

64

One mighty stroke at last achieved its aim.
Between his sword and shield it reached his breast.
His mail was thick, his corslet was the same,
His metal apron too was of the best,
Yet through them passed that sword of cruel fame.
They being unequal to this crucial test,
Nothing resisted the descending blow
Which slashed from mid-breast to the saddle-bow.

65

If Mandricardo's stroke had fallen true,
It would have split Zerbino like a cane;
But as it scarcely penetrated to
The living flesh, the wound was in the main
Inflicted on the skin; a span or two
Perhaps in length, it caused a shallow pain
And in a crimson stream the blood ran hot,
Streaking his shining armour to the foot.

66

Thus have I often seen a scarlet band
Of ribbon on a silver dress, with art
By such device divided by that hand,
Whiter than alabaster, which my heart,
Alas! divides. Zerbino's courage and
His skill in war play now but little part.
That Tartar monarch, as his strokes evince,
In strength, as well as sword, outdoes the prince.

67

This blow of Mandricardo's had appeared
More deadly than it was in its effect
And Isabella, looking on, had feared
The worst (nor could she otherwise suspect).
It froze her bosom and with horror seared
Her heart. Zerbino's daring is unchecked.
Enraged, he takes his sword in both his hands
And on the Tartar's head a blow he lands.

68

Down to his charger's neck the Saracen,
 For all his pride, was bowed by such a stroke.
 Only his magic helmet saved him then;
 So mighty was the crash it almost broke
 His skull; not waiting to count up to ten,
 Or to defer revenge, the pagan took
 His sword and raised it high above the crest,
 Hoping to split Zerbino to his breast.

69

Zerbino called both eye and mind to aid
 And turned his charger quickly to the right,
 But not so fast as to escape the blade,
 Which caught his shield and through the centre, quite
 From top to bottom, two half portions made.
 The thong beneath was severed, and the knight
 Received upon his arm the blow, which passed,
 Piercing his armour, to his thigh at last.

70

Now here, now there, Zerbino tries to break,
 But all in vain, through his opponent's guard,
 For not one blemish all his blows can make
 Upon the armour of King Mandricard;
 But *he* can now a good advantage take,
 And presses back his enemy so hard
 (Whose shield and helm are broken) that his blade
 Has seven or eight relentless gashes made.

71

But though the prince was weak from loss of blood,
 Of his condition he was unaware.
 His vigorous and valiant heart withstood
 The strain and he was able still to bear
 His body upright; meanwhile in the wood,
 His lady, pale with terror, to the fair
 Young Doralice turns, and begs her end
 The deadly strife in which the two contend.

72

Being courteous as well as beautiful
 (And being uncertain who will win the fight),
 She gladly now persuades her love to call
 A truce; and Isabella, too, her knight
 Beseeches so successfully that all
 His anger from his heart is put to flight.
 Letting her choose the path, he rides away
 And unconcluded leaves the bitter fray.

73

And Fiordiligi, who has also seen
 The trusty sword of the unhappy Count
 Plied to such ill effect, feels woe as keen.
 She weeps and strikes her brow at this affront.
 Ah, would that Brandimart had present been!
 And if she ever finds him, she'll recount
 The whole, and when he learns what has occurred
 Not long will Mandricardo flaunt that sword!

74

She went on searching night and day in vain
 For Brandimart, for whose embrace she yearned,
 But he, who could have healed her grief and pain,
 Unknown to her to Paris had returned.
 She wandered over hill and over plain,
 Till, as she crossed a river, she discerned
 And recognized the frenzied paladin.
 But let us say what happened to Zerbino.

75

To leave the sword so shames him as a knight,
 It pains him more than any other ill,
 Though he can barely sit his horse upright
 For all the blood he's lost, and loses still.
 Heat, by his anger kindled, has now quite
 Departed, while his grief increases till
 It rushes through his veins and, as it grows,
 He feels his life-force ebbing to its close.

76

Too weak to travel farther, with a sigh
 He stopped beside a stream and down he lay.
 To help him Isabella longs to try.
 She knows not what to do, nor what to say
 And, failing proper care, she sees him die.
 All habitations are too far away
 Where to a doctor she might find access,
 Invoking pity or his worldliness.

77

So she can only call upon the skies,
 Reproaching Fortune and her fate in vain:
 'Ah, why was I not drowned, alas!' she cries,
 'When first my ship set out upon the main?'
 On her Zerbino turns his languid eyes.
 Her lamentations cause him greater pain
 Than all his wounds, which no respite allow
 And to the point of death have brought him now.

78

'My only grief, dear heart,' Zerbino said,
 'Is that I leave you helpless and alone.
 If you will love me after I am dead,
 I'll have no vain regrets when I am gone.
 If in some safer place my life were shed,
 These few last moments had serenely flown:
 Contented, happy and entirely blest
 That, dying, in your loving arms I rest.

79

'But since I am condemned to leave you here,
 A victim of whoever first goes past,
 By this sweet mouth, by these sweet eyes, I swear,
 And by these tresses which have bound me fast,
 Though I go down to Hell in my despair,
 Yet every punishment will be surpassed
 When thoughts of you arise whom I have left
 Abandoned here without me and bereft.'

80

And Isabella, infinitely sad,
 Bending a tearful countenance to his
 And touching with her own his mouth, which had
 The languor of a rose whose season is
 Gone by, whose beauty, paling in the shade,
 No passer-by has plucked and no one sees,
 She answered thus: 'My life, do not believe
 Your spirit shall without me take its leave.

81

'Of this, I do beseech, my love, doubt not:
 I'll follow you to Heaven or to Hell.
 Our souls, from one same bow together shot,
 Still fly as one and thus will ever dwell.
 As soon as I have seen those dear eyes shut,
 My grief all suffering will so excel
 That I will die, or else, I give my word,
 Into my breast today I'll plunge this sword.

82

'And for our bodies I at least have hope
 That better dead than living they may fare,
 For someone passing by perchance may stop
 And in one sepulchre, with pious care,
 May bury them.' Her welling tears now drop
 Where with her lips, ere Death the Plunderer
 Has done his worst, his fleeting breath she drains
 While yet some vital sign of it remains.

83

Exerting his now faltering voice, he spoke:
 'Belovèd, I entreat you by that love
 You showed me when for me you once forsook
 Your father's shores, live out your life enough
 To reach the time allotted in the book
 Of destiny, as God has willed above.
 This I command you, if command I may.
 How deep my love was, ne'er forget, I pray.

84

'God may perhaps provide a means to save
 You from all villainous attack, as when
 He sent Orlando to the pirates' cave
 To rescue you from those rapacious men.
 Thanks also to His aid, the ocean wave
 Did not engulf you; by His help again
 You managed Odorico to defy.
 But if all fails, then be content to die.'

85

I do not think this final utterance
 Could be distinctly heard; as fading light,
 For lack of wax or other sustenance,
 Subsides and is extinguished, so the knight
 Expired. Who can the sorrowing desolance
 Of Isabella in her wretched plight
 Convey, as pale her dear love lies, and cold
 As ice the form which now her arms enfold?

86

Upon his blood-stained body she then flings
 Her own, and bathes him with her streaming tears.
 Her shrieks awaken distant echoings.
 Neither her bosom nor her cheeks she spares,
 But rends the tender flesh, the curling rings
 Of her gold tresses, in her frenzy, tears
 Unjustly from her head, while in her pain
 She cries, unceasing, the loved name in vain.

87

So deep her rage, so wild her ravings seem,
 Which sorrow has induced, the maid might well
 Have plunged the sword into her breast, I deem,
 Thus disobeying her Zerbino's will,
 But that a hermit, who the crystal stream
 Was wont to visit from his near-by cell,
 Arriving at that instant, her intent
 Was able, by persuasion, to prevent.

88

This venerable hermit goodness joined
 To natural prudence and was well endowed
 With charitable feeling; every kind
 Of precept he could quote, if time allowed.
 On the afflicted damsel he enjoined
 Patient endurance, and good reasons showed,
 And many virtuous women instanced too
 From the Old Testament and from the New.

89

And then he showed her that true happiness
 In life was to be found in God alone.
 All other hopes, all other earthly bliss,
 Were transitory, fluid and soon flown.
 He urged so justly, from her pitiless
 Intention he dissuaded her quite soon,
 And she resolved, so well she understood,
 To dedicate her life henceforth to God.

90

But she has no intention to abjure
 Her love, or to neglect her lord's remains,
 For, to protect the body and ensure
 Its safe interment in due course, she plans
 To keep it by her, night and day; the pure
 And holy man, still strong in back and reins,
 Helps her to lay the prince upon his horse,
 Which stands dejected, and they take their course.

91

The prudent hermit did not deem it wise
 To take the young and lovely Isabel
 To the wild mountain-cave, wherein there lies,
 Not far away, his solitary cell.
 He thinks: 'A conflagration will arise
 If in one hand I bear a torch as well
 As straw.' He does not trust either his age
 Or prudence in such trial to engage.

92

So he resolves to take her to Provence.
Close to Marseilles, he knows a castle where
A sisterhood, in holy abstinence,
A convent has established, rich and fair.
And at another castle, which by chance
They come upon, for the dead cavalier
Is made, at their request, a coffin which
Is long, capacious and well sealed with pitch.

93

They travel many miles for many days.
Since war is raging everywhere they turn,
They choose the rough and least frequented ways,
For to be unobserved is their concern.
At last a knight obstructs their path and says
Ignoble words of insult; you shall learn
His name when later I return to him;
But now King Mandricardo is my theme.

94

When he had ceased from battle, the young king
Sat down to rest a while in cooling shade,
Taking his ease beside the crystal spring,
And from his charger reins and saddle had
Removed, letting it go meandering
To graze at will. Not long like this he stayed,
Ere his attention was aroused again
On seeing a knight descending to the plain.

95

As soon as Doralice raised her brow,
She recognized the cavalier and to
The king she said, 'Proud Rodomonte now
Approaches down the hill to challenge you,
Unless my eyes deceive me; and I vow
All valour and resolve you must renew.
He holds the loss of me, his bride, a great
Outrage; his claim he comes to vindicate.'

96

As when a well-trained hawk a duck or quail
Or dove or partridge or like bird has seen
Winging towards it from some distant trail
And its bright head has reared, alert and keen,
So now the king, like one who could not fail
To slaughter Rodomonte, and has been
Awaiting this encounter, with delight
And confidence remounted for the fight.

97

They rode towards each other and from where
The haughty interchanges could be heard,
Waving his trusty weapon in the air,
The monarch of Algiers, by fury stirred,
Tossing his head in menace, cried: 'Beware!'
And vowed, his frenzy mounting with each word,
His rival would repent the outrage shown
To him, and the rash deed which he had done.

98

And Mandricard replied: 'He tries in vain
Who tries to frighten or to threaten me.
Children or women take alarm, or men
Who never battle know or weapons see:
Not I, who love all combat and would fain
Spend day and night in strife, whether it be
On foot, on horse, unarmed, in arms arrayed,
In fields of battle, or in the stockade.'

99

They pass to oaths, with insults interspersed,
To swords unsheathed, to clash of blade on blade,
As when a wind, which softly blew at first,
The ash and oak-tree back and forward swayed,
And day, by clouds of dust, to night reversed,
Uprooted trees, and houses flattened laid,
Vessels submerged at sea, and in the wood
The scattered sheep destroyed by storm or flood.

100

The pagans, who no equals have on earth,
 With their last ounce of strength, from their brave
 To fearful blows and battle now give birth, [hearts,
 Befitting foes of such ferocious parts.
 The globe reverberates in all its girth
 Soon as the clamour of the combat starts.
 Sparks from the clashing blades to heaven rise,
 Lighting a thousand lanterns in the skies.

101

Taking no rest, nor stopping to take breath,
 The kings no respite have in their travail.
 Now on this side, now that, above, beneath,
 They try to pierce the armour and the mail.
 Though they pursue the battle to the death,
 In gaining terrain neither can prevail
 (Perhaps the ground there costs too much an inch),
 Nor stir beyond the compass of a trench.

102

Among a thousand blows, the Tartar king
 One blow now deals on Rodomonte's head,
 Both hands upon the sword, such as to bring
 A myriad of lights, whirling at speed
 Before his eyes, more than the stars that ring
 The world; then backwards on his startled steed
 He bends and from his saddle, all strength gone,
 He dangles, with his lady looking on.

103

As when a sturdy and well-fashioned bow,
 With finely tempered metal reinforced,
 By winches and by levers is bent low,
 The heavier the weight by which it's forced,
 The greater is the fury it will show
 On its release, nor does it come off worst,
 So Rodomonte rises instantly
 With doubled strength to strike his enemy.

104

And where he had been struck, in that same place
 He likewise hit the son of Agrican,
 And yet the weapon failed to cleave his face.
 His helm protects him as none other can.
 The Tartar was so stunned he lost all trace
 Of what o'clock it was; the African,
 Who now was so enraged that he saw red,
 Brought down a second blow upon his head.

105

The charger, flinching from the deadly sword,
 Which whistles as it menaces on high,
 Now, to its own undoing, saves its lord,
 As, backing a few steps, it means to try
 To leap well out of range, but in reward
 Receives the impact on its skull, which by
 No Trojan helm (unlike its master's crown)
 Defended was; stone dead it tumbles down.

106

No longer stunned, the king leaps to his feet
 And brandishes his blade, burning inside
 And out with fury that his horse should meet
 Its death. The African intends to ride
 Him down and spurs his charger; no retreat
 The Tartar makes, nor does he turn aside.
 A rock does not withdraw before the flood:
 The charger fell and Mandricardo stood.

107

Feeling his charger sink beneath his thighs,
 The African has grasped the saddle-bow.
 Letting his stirrups dangle, he relies
 On his dexterity and leaps below.
 On equal footing now, and in no wise
 Placated, they resume; with every blow
 Their hatred, pride and anger are increased:
 But suddenly an envoy comes in haste.

108

This envoy was among the messengers
Sent by King Agramant throughout all France
To rally all the private cavaliers
And captains, for, with deadly arrogance,
The fleurs-de-lis, inflicting dire reverse,
Had ravaged all the camp; and if at once
Help is not mustered and despatched, says he,
The slaughter of the Moors will certain be.

109

He recognized the foemen straight away,
Not by their surcoats or their crests, as much
As by the swordsmanship which they display;
No other hands were capable of such.
He does not dare to intervene that day,
Nor as an envoy with his baton touch
Their blades; though he's a king's ambassador,
He does not trust immunity so far.

110

Approaching Doralice in their stead,
He says King Agramant and Stordilan
And King Marsilio, with few to aid,
In their encampment by the Christian clan
Are sorely pressed; he begs her to persuade
The valiant warriors, as best she can,
From their ferocious combat to desist
And hasten back to Paris to assist.

111

The lady, with great courage, stands between
The combatants and says: 'Stop, I command!
If you both love me, let it now be seen.
Put up your swords; save them to put an end
To the great peril which the Saracen
Now faces; ringed by foes on every hand,
Our people, lacking all defences, wait
For help - or ruin, if help comes too late.'

112

And then the fate to which they'd all succumb
The ambassador outlined; when he had done,
He duly handed letters-patent from
Troiano's son to Ulieno's son.
The warriors cannot refuse to come.
On this decision they agree as one:
To call a truce to last until the day
When the besiegers have been chased away.

113

And they resolved that without more ado,
Once they secured the safety of their side,
Their former enmity they would renew,
Forgetting comradeship, and then decide,
By cruel tests of arms, which of the two
The more deserved the lady as his bride.
Upon her hands this oath they swore, and she
For their good faith as knights stood guarantee.

114

Dame Discord by this plan is much put out,
Being a sworn enemy of truce and peace.
And Pride likewise begins to sulk and pout.
She cannot bear such rivalry to cease;
But Love is also present, who can flout
Them both and put an end to their caprice.
All-conquering, his arrows are enough
To drive Dame Discord and her ally off.

115

The truce was duly sworn, as I have said,
As she desired who had command of them.
They lacked one horse, for Mandricard's lay dead
And nothing further could be hoped of him.
But Brigliadoro came to meet their need,
From where he cropped the grasses by the stream.
My lord, this canto is concluded now,
So I will make a pause, if you'll allow.

8

Orlando and Rinaldo I here mean:
 One in his furious and frenzied state,
 In heat and cold, in sunshine and in rain,
 Runs naked like a torrent in full spate.
 And now the other, scarcely less insane,
 Abandons you just when your need is great.
 His love is not in Paris, he now knows,
 And so in search of her at once he goes.

9

A fraudulent magician, as I said,
 Made him believe by a fantastic spell
 (By such illusion many he misled)
 Angelica approached the citadel
 With Count Orlando; to his heart there sped
 A pang of jealousy more terrible
 Than any lover knew; to Court he went
 And straight away to Britain he was sent.

10

After the battle, when renown he earned
 And glory by immuring Agramant,
 To Paris then Rinaldo had returned.
 To every fortress, every house he went,
 And every cloister; every stone he turned,
 All paths explored and followed every scent.
 Seeing at last his lady was not there,
 Nor yet the Count, he left to seek the pair.

11

Then, picturing Orlando's lustful joy
 At Brava and Anglante, where he thought
 That in those sweet delights which never cloy
 The lovers were now dallying, he sought
 Them both, in vain; then, hoping to employ
 A ruse whereby Orlando might be caught,
 To Paris he returns, to lie in wait,
 For surely soon the Count must pass the gate.

12

Rinaldo tarries there a day or two.
 Orlando does not come, so he decides
 To visit both his strongholds, and anew
 Sets off, in hope of hearing where he hides.
 From early morning until night, all through
 The burning midday heat, Rinaldo rides,
 And back and forth, whether by moon or sun;
 Two hundred times he travels, not just one.

13

But the old Adversary who caused Eve
 To lift her hand towards forbidden fruit
 His envious eyes now raises to perceive
 Rinaldo's absence on his vain pursuit.
 Seeing the harassment he can now give
 To the whole Christian army, by astute
 Manoeuvring he brings upon the scene
 The greatest knights of all the Saracen.

14

First, in Gradasso's heart, and Sacripant's
 (Companions since they fled Atlante's spell),
 An eagerness the Prince of Darkness plants
 To help the armies of the Infidel,
 To add their valour to King Agramant's,
 And Charles's stubborn contumacy quell;
 And as along an unknown route they went
 A demon to escort them Satan sent.

15

And then another demon he despatched
 To urge on Rodomont and Mandricard
 Where Malagigi's evil sprite, well matched
 With this, drove Doralice's horse so hard.
 And even further mischief Satan hatched
 By sending yet another to retard
 Marfisa and Ruggiero; they with less,
 The other pair with greater, speed progress.

CANTO XXIX

1

How vacillating is the mind of man!
 How rapid are the changes which it makes!
 How quickly jettisoned is every plan!
 How soon new love in angry hearts awakes!
 Through Rodomonte's veins such fire there ran,
 Such burning hatred of the female sex,
 I wondered whether there were any ways
 Of quenching, or of cooling, such a blaze.

2

Sweet ladies, for the evil which he spoke
 Concerning you, I have been so irate
 That I'll not pardon him till I invoke
 All my best skill and fully demonstrate
 In pen and ink to all who read my book
 How wrong and how unfounded was his hate;
 Far better were it to have bitten through
 His tongue, or held it, than speak ill of you.

3

That he was ignorant will now be shown,
 And stupid too for, venting his tirade,
 He aimed it at all women, every one,
 Without reserve, and no exception made.
 And now by Isabella he's undone.
 A glance from her: all his convictions fade.
 Straightway he puts her in the other's place -
 Her name unknown, and scarcely glimpsed her face.

4

And so, by this new passion pricked and stung,
 He urges further reasoning, in vain,
 For Isabella, though she is so young,
 In serving God salvation hopes to gain.
 The hermit, like a shield robust and strong,
 Her firm resolve continues to sustain;
 With many sound and valid arguments
 He valorously comes to her defence.

5

And when the cruel pagan has endured
 For long enough the hermit's bold defence,
 When he has many times in vain assured
 Him he can get him to his desert hence,
 When even then he finds he is not cured
 Of persevering in his insolence,
 Enraged, the holy hermit's beard he snatches
 And where he pulls, it comes away in batches.

6

His wrath and fury grew till, like a vice,
 His hand had gripped the hermit's neck and throat;
 Then round his head he whirled him once or twice
 And flung him towards the sea; whether or not
 The holy man then paid the final price,
 Varies according to the anecdote:
 In one, his body struck against a stone
 And there, unrecognized, his parts were strewn.

7

Some have suggested in the interim
 He fell into the sea, three miles away,
 And that he died because he could not swim:
 All he could do was clasp his hands and pray;
 Still others that a saint assisted him:
 A hand came out of Heaven to convey
 The drowning man ashore; how'er it be,
 No more about him now you'll hear from me.

8

The cruel Rodomonte, having thus
Removed the importuning holy man,
Now with a countenance less mutinous
Turned to the grieving damsel and began
In words much favoured by the amorous:
She was his heart, his life and dearer than
Whatever he held dear, his fondest hope,
And other terms which gave his passion scope.

9

His manner was so gentle and controlled,
No vestige of coercion it betrayed;
His pride, so fierce and furious of old,
Was humbled by the beauty of the maid.
He knew he had the fruit within his hold,
Yet not one move to pluck it he essayed.
It seemed to him it might not taste so sweet
If as a gift she did not offer it.

10

And by such gentle means, by slow degrees
He hopes to bend the damsel to his will;
And, helpless in that lonely place, she sees
The cat will pounce upon the mouse, and kill.
Rather than suffer such indignities,
A death by burning seems less terrible.
She tries to think of some device or act
By which she can escape from him intact.

11

She is resolved by her own hand to die
Rather than yield to Rodomonte's lust,
And his barbaric cruelty defy
Rather than violate her sacred trust.
Though unkind Fate had chosen to deny
Fulfilment of her love, she knew she must
Fulfil the vow of chastity she made
When in her arms her cavalier lay dead.

12

She saw the pagan king's blind appetite
Grow stronger still, and wondered what to do,
For when such frenzy rose to its full height
Resistance would be useless then, she knew.
But as she meditated on her plight
She found at last the course she must pursue
To save her chastity and her good name,
For which she well deserves undying fame.

13

The ugly Saracen, who moved towards
His victim with a resolute intent,
Was using less conciliatory words.
His evil purpose was now evident.
Then Isabella said, 'If the rewards
Of virtue will not lead you to relent,
I offer you a recompense to spare
My honour: you have only to forbear.

14

'So small a pleasure and so brief as this,
Of which there is a plentiful supply,
Is not to be preferred to that which is
A lasting boon; women with whom to lie,
Lovely in face and form, are numberless,
But no one else could give you, only I
(Or very few in all the world I'd say),
The gift which I can offer you today.

15

'I know a herb – along my way it grew –
And I can find it easily again;
It must be boiled with ivy and with rue
Over a fire of cypress-wood; to strain
The liquid, let it be pressed between two
Sinless hands; take the fluid next and stain
Your body with it thrice; you will grow hard
And can be harmed by neither fire nor sword.

16

'He who anoints himself with it, I say –
But not just once, three times, in every part –
Invulnerable for a month will stay;
The virtue of the juice will then depart
And more of it must be distilled; today,
I'll make you some, for I have learnt the art.
This day you'll see such liquid is worth more
Than if you now were Europe's conqueror.

17

'I ask you in return for this to swear
Upon your faith that by no word or deed
You will again molest me or come near,
And that my vow of chastity you'll heed.'
This offer made the Saracen forbear,
And to the stipulation he agreed.
He promised all she asked him and beyond,
Eager to be a knight whom none can wound.

18

And he will keep his word until he tries
The liquid for its marvellous effects.
All sign of violence he will disguise.
His menacing behaviour he corrects.
And yet he later means to have the prize,
For neither God nor Prophet he respects.
Of all the liars Africa can boast,
He is the one who breaks his word the most.

19

A thousand times and more the pagan king
Now promised her that she was safe with him,
If she procured the liquid which could bring
Immunity from wounds in every limb.
So, over cliffs the maid went clambering
And down into the valleys deep and dim.
She gathered many herbs; the Saracen
Followed her everywhere, alert and keen.

20

They picked as many herbs as she thought right.
Some had their roots and others rootless were.
When they regained their dwelling, late at night,
She, of a chastity beyond compare,
Boiled the concoction till the morning light
With full attention and the utmost care:
And Rodomonte watched her as she stirred
And, as it simmered, in the potion peered.

21

As he beguiles the time with cards and dice
With the few servitors who are awake,
The heat becomes oppressive; in a trice
A raging thirst they are obliged to slake.
Filling their flagons more than once or twice,
Refreshment more than once or twice they take.
Two barrels of Greek wine are soon left dry
Which they had pillaged from some passers-by.

22

Now, Rodomonte is not used to wine,
For alcohol the Muslim law proscribes;
And tasting it, he finds it more divine
Than nectar or the manna of the tribes
Of Israel; he curses as malign
The Saracen observance, and imbibes.
The wine was excellent and freely flowed.
That it was strong, their spinning heads soon showed.

23

And in the meantime Isabella took
The cauldron from the fire; the herbs were done.
No longer need she leave them there to cook.
'No empty words upon the wind I've sown,'
She said, 'as I shall prove if you will look.
Experiment, the means by which is shown
The truth which is distinguished from a lie,
On my own body I shall shortly try.'

24

And she went on, 'I want to be the first
To test the potent virtue of this juice,
For you might otherwise suspect the worst
And poisonous ingredients deduce.
When head and neck and breast I have immersed,
Then put your sword with all your strength to use.
See if this potion has the power to check
Your weapon's edge, or if it cuts my neck.'

25

She smoothed the mixture on, as she had said;
With joy her neck to the imprudent king
She bared – imprudent, and by wine misled,
Against whose fumes no helm or shield can bring
Defence; and like a stupid dunderhead,
His cruel weapon wildly brandishing,
Her breast and torso he divested of
Her lovely head, the dwelling once of Love.

26

It bounced three times, and from it a clear voice
Was heard to call Zerbino, for whose sake
Unflinchingly she made so rare a choice
And bravely this escape preferred to make.
Heroic soul, who paid so high a price,
Who, with your very life, so young, at stake,
Fulfilled your sacred vow of chastity
(A term unheard-of in our century),

27

Depart in peace, blest soul, so sweet and fair!
Would that I had the skill and eloquence,
And that my verse with art embellished were,
So that a thousand, thousand years from hence
Your celebrated name the world might hear
And learn the story of your innocence!
Depart in peace to the supernal throne,
Of all your sex the perfect paragon.

28

On such heroic courage God confers
Encomium: 'More highly I commend
This deed which thou hast done than hers
Who brought the rule of Tarquin to an end.
Among My laws, which time shall not reverse,
Lo! a new edict henceforth I intend
Which by the irreviolable seas I swear
No man shall change nor future age impair.'

29

And the Creator uttered His decree:
'Whoever in the future bears thy name,
Wise, beautiful and courteous shall be,
And virtue cherish as her constant aim.
Renowned in rhyme, honoured in history,
It will be chronicled, and with its fame
Parnassus, Pindus, Helicon will ring,
"Isabella, Isabella" echoing.'

30

God spoke; the sea and the surrounding air
More tranquil then became and more serene.
Her soul, so chaste, ascends to the third sphere,
To be embraced anew by her Zerbin.
The pagan brute was left to stand and stare,
More cruel than Bréhus had ever been.
Then rage and shame his fuddled mind possess.
Blaming the wine, he curses his excess.

31

And to placate or partly satisfy
The soul of Isabella, now in bliss,
Since by his action she had come to die,
He thought he would attempt amends for this:
Her life, so brief, should be remembered by
The church: for all that he had done amiss
He would convert it to a sepulchre
And dedicate the monument to her.

32

From villages around he summons there
 Stone-masons and six thousand men at least.
 Some answer willingly, others in fear.
 The height of the surrounding hills decreased
 As heavy blocks were cut and trundled near.
 From tip to base the stone they raised and dressed
 Was ninety yards; his aim was to enclose
 The church wherein the lovers now repose.

33

It emulates the mighty edifice
 Beside the Tiber, built by Hadrian.
 A tower is raised, near the necropolis;
 To dwell therein is Rodomonte's plan,
 And he gives orders that a bridge which is
 Sufficient length the foaming stream shall span.
 Though it is long, it has the width at best
 For two good horsemen there to ride abreast.

34

Two horsemen riding level or who met
 Half-way across its length-finding thereon
 No guard-rail or defence or parapet,
 Would fall into the stream from either one
 Side or the other; thus a toll was set
 For pagans and for Christians; very soon
 The spoils of warriors adorn the shrine,
 Where trophies in their thousands gleam and shine.

35

In ten days or in less the bridge was made.
 At a high price the river could be crossed.
 The tomb was not completed at such speed;
 Nor had the tower reached its uppermost
 And crowning summit, but a look-out stayed
 On the top storey, watching from his post,
 And every time a cavalier drew near
 The watchman's horn was sounded, loud and clear.

36

Then Rodomonte armed himself and went
 To challenge the intruder; now from one,
 Now from the other, bank he would prevent
 His progress; if the cavalier came on,
 He had to battle in a strange event
 Fought in a narrow list, its like unknown;
 The destrier would fall at one false step
 Into the river full and fast and deep.

37

By fighting in such peril on the brink,
 Taking so many risks of falling in,
 The pagan hoped that if obliged to drink
 The water it would wash away his sin,
 Which had been caused by wine; he seemed to think
 That such a plunge would leave him purged and clean:
 Water, which quenches thirst for wine, he says,
 The errors which wine causes must erase.

38

Not long does Rodomonte wait in vain.
 By many soon the bridge attempted is.
 By those who made for Italy or Spain
 No other route more travelled was than this.
 Others who dare at any cost to gain
 True glory such a challenge will not miss.
 All of them hope to win a victor's crown.
 All of them lose their arms, and many drown.

39

Those whom the pagan vanquished in the fight,
 If they were Saracens, he was content
 To strip, and on their weapons clearly write
 Their names and hang them on the monument.
 For Christians he devised a different plight:
 To keep them prisoners was his intent
 And send them to Algiers; and then one day
 The mad, deranged Orlando passed that way.

40

The frenzied Count had turned his steps by chance
Towards the river, deep and swift and wide,
Where many masons laboured to advance
The tower and the tomb; for all they tried,
The work was not yet done; with sword and lance,
Without a helmet, Rodomont defied
All comers as Orlando then appeared
And river-bank and bridgehead quickly neared.

41

And with a madman's strength he leaps the gate
And runs across the bridge at frantic speed;
But Rodomonte, puzzled and irate,
Beneath the tower, on foot, not on his steed,
Bellows an order for him to retreat.
(To challenge such as him he sees no need.)
'Go back, you boor; this is no place for you;
Elsewhere your rash and headlong course pursue.

42

'This bridge was made for lords and cavaliers,
Not for such coarse and bestial passers-by.'
Orlando, being distracted, nothing hears,
But comes ahead despite the pagan's cry.
'I see I'll have to box this madman's ears,'
Says Rodomonte, his resentment high.
Meaning to push him off the bridge, he goes,
For who it is who comes he little knows.

43

A fair young damsel came in sight just then.
As she approached the bridge, her lovely face
And beautiful adornments could be seen.
She picked her way with care, at prudent pace.
My lord, this is the damsel who has been
In search of Brandimarte, but no trace
Of him has found, for she looks everywhere
But Paris, where he is, as you're aware.

44

When Fiordiligi (that's the damsel's name)
Arrived upon the bridge, the pagan king
Was wrestling with Orlando, for his aim
Had been to catch and in the water fling
The frenzied trespasser who onward came.
She knew Orlando's wits were wandering;
She realized at once this must be he,
And marvelled greatly at such malady.

45

She stops to watch the outcome of the fight
Between this pair of combatants, one nude,
The other armed, who strove with all their might
To throw each other down into the flood.
'This madman has the valour of a knight,'
The pagan muttered and, as best he could,
He turned and whirled and veered from side to side,
Swelling the while with scorn and wrath and pride.

46

With one and then the other hand he tries
To get a better hold; he waits his chance,
Trying to trip him, now between the thighs
And now between the feet; Orlando's stance
Is shaken by no force, nor by surprise.
The pagan, like a stolid bear which wants
To devastate the tree from which it fell,
His rage and fury spends on him pell-mell.

47

Orlando's mind is sunk, I know not where.
He uses in this battle force alone,
That mighty force, exceptional and rare,
In all the universe a paragon.
Locked swaying in a fierce embrace, the pair
Pitch headlong from the bridge they wrestle on
And plunge together to the utmost deeps.
The margins tremble as the water leaps.

48

The river makes them separate in haste.
 Orlando, naked, agile as a fish,
 Strikes out with arms and legs, and swimming fast
 Soon lands upon the shore; he has no wish
 To look behind or further time to waste,
 But straightway rushes off; his heathenish
 Opponent, whom his armour held beneath,
 Emerged more slowly and with laboured breath.

49

Meanwhile the damsel was now seen to ride
 Across the bridge and, venturing with care,
 She searched the monument from side to side
 To see if Brandimarte's shield was there.
 No sign of her dear love was to be spied,
 So she had hopes of finding him elsewhere.
 But let us now the Count Orlando find,
 Who river, bridge and tower leaves behind.

50

It would be mad if all his madnesses
 One after one I tried to chronicle.
 There were so many, what their number is
 And where to finish them, I could not tell;
 I will select whatever instances
 For my heroic song are suitable,
 Such as his deeds (which I must not refuse)
 High in the Pyrenees above Toulouse.

51

Since madness took possession of the knight,
 For many miles his fury drove him on,
 Till finally he clambered to the height
 Which has divided Frank from Tarragon.
 He'd followed the direction of the light,
 Ever pursuing the declining sun.
 A narrow mountain-path he went along
 Which on one side a valley overhung.

52

And face to face along this pass he met
 Two woodcutters, both young, who goaded home
 An ass which bore the wood they went to get;
 And when they see this raving madman come,
 They utter many a shout and many a threat,
 And coarsely order him to give them room.
 'Go back,' they call, or 'Stand aside,' they cry,
 'And clear the way for us as we go by.'

53

Orlando makes no answer to their shouts,
 Save that with fury he lets fly a kick
 Which takes the donkey squarely in the guts.
 Joined with the frenzy of a lunatic,
 His strength is now extreme beyond all doubts.
 The donkey soon becomes the merest speck
 As through the sky it travels like a bird
 And to a hill a mile off is transferred.

54

Next, he advanced upon the youths, and one,
 Who had more luck than judgement, leapt below,
 A jump of sixty yards, but not for fun –
 Because there was no other place to go.
 However, half-way down he landed on
 A patch of grass and bramble, and although
 He scratched his face a little, luckily
 In other ways the lad escaped scot-free.

55

The other clambered up a jagged spur
 And tried to gain the summit of the rock,
 Hoping some hiding-places yonder were,
 Where he might yet escape by hook or crook.
 But this Orlando does not let occur:
 He reaches up and seizes either hock.
 Parting his arms as wide as they will go,
 He tears his victim's body into two,

56

Just as we sometimes see a heron split
 Apart, or see a chicken opened wide,
 So that a falcon or a hawk can eat
 The smoking entrails and be satisfied.
 Lucky the lad who fell upon his feet,
 Although to break his neck, it seemed, he tried!
 And he it was who told the miracle,
 And Turpin heard it and told us as well.

57

Such acts and many more astounding deeds
 Are done as he continues to explore.
 At last, towards noon, he takes a path which leads
 Downhill to Spain, and there along the shore,
 Where the salt wave advances and recedes,
 In Tarragon he journeys as before.
 The fury which possesses him has planned
 That he shall make a shelter in the sand.

58

And so, to seek protection from the sun,
 He ran for cover where the sand was dry
 And there he lay, unseen by anyone,
 When with her spouse Angelica passed by,
 For to the coast of Spain they too had gone,
 First having gazed along it from on high.
 A yard away, Angelica the fair
 Was passing, of his presence unaware.

59

Beholding him, she would not think this man
 Could be Orlando, he was so much changed,
 For ever since his malady began,
 Quite naked in all weathers he had ranged.
 He was as burnt and black as if Aswan
 Or where the Garamanths their gods avenged
 Had been his birthplace, or the mountains where
 The sources of the river Nile appear.

60

His eyes were almost sunken in his head;
 His face was thin and fleshless as a bone.
 His tangled, bristling hair, inspiring dread,
 And shaggy beard were wild to look upon.
 Angelica in trembling terror fled;
 In trembling terror, from this monster flown,
 Filling the heavens with her piercing shrieks,
 Help and protection from her guide she seeks.

61

And when Orlando, wild and witless, sees
 That delicate and lovely countenance
 And that sweet form which so delight and please,
 He is consumed with greed for them at once
 And, leaping up, he makes a rush to seize
 Her whom he'd cherished with such reverence.
 Devotion long forgotten, he gives chase
 Just as a dog after its prey would race.

62

And young Medoro, seeing him pursue
 His wife, against the madman spurred his mount.
 He tried to run him down, and struck him too,
 Meaning to cut his head off; but the Count
 (That it was he in person no one knew)
 Had skin so hard it made the sword seem blunt,
 For his enchanted body was like steel,
 Impenetrable, suffering no ill.

63

Feeling the blows descending from behind
 He turned, and as he turned he clenched his fist.
 With force beyond the measurement of mind,
 He struck a blow which nothing could resist.
 He struck the horse which galloped like the wind,
 Like glass its head was splintered by that wrist,
 And the same instant he had turned again
 And after her who fled, once more he ran.

64

With whip and spur she urges on her mare.
 In her predicament it would seem slow
 If speeding like an arrow through the air.
 Faster and faster yet she makes it go.
 The magic ring, of which you are aware,
 She puts at last into her mouth, and so
 (The ring had kept its virtue, there's no doubt)
 She vanished like a light which is blown out.

65

If capture by the madman she so feared,
 Or if the mare stopped dead, I cannot tell,
 But at the moment when she had transferred
 The ring and thus became invisible,
 High in the air her legs were upwards reared.
 Leaving the saddle, on the sand she fell.
 Behind her came Orlando in pursuit,
 Gaining upon her though he ran on foot.

66

And she was lucky that she did not land
 An inch or two behind; colliding then,
 He would have left her dead upon the sand,
 But Fortune favoured her and stepped between.
 Once more to stealing she must put her hand
 (And good at this she has already been):
 For now she needs another destrier.
 No further use will that one be to her.

67

But she will find another, have no fear.
 We will pursue the madman's vestiges.
 His rage and fury do not disappear
 Simply because the lady vanishes.
 Closer and closer he pursues the mare,
 And level with her now he almost is.
 He touches her, he has her by the mane,
 And finally he grasps and pulls the rein.

68

Orlando takes her with the same delight
 As when a lover takes a fair young maid.
 Her bridle and her rein he first puts right,
 Then, leaping in the saddle, rides the jade
 For miles and miles; not resting day or night,
 Unmercifully on her back he stayed,
 Not once removing saddle, rein or bit;
 And neither grass, nor hay, he let her eat.

69

Wanting to pass a ditch that bars his way
 He tries to leap across it on her back.
 She falls; he feels no shock and no dismay.
 She puts her shoulder out, the poor old hack.
 She cannot move, so to avoid delay
 He hoists her on *his* shoulder like a sack.
 He clammers up and carries her as far
 Ahead as three lengths of a bowshot are.

70

And then, becoming weary of his load,
 He set her down and pulled her by the rein
 And, slowly limping, after him she trod.
 'Gee up!' the Count commanded, but in vain,
 And had she galloped like the wind, she would
 Have been too leisurely for his insane
 Desire; at last he took her bridle off
 And tied it to her right and hinder hoof.

71

Tugging and dragging, he encouraged her,
 As though she could have followed him with ease.
 The rocks along the coast, which jagged were,
 Stripped hair and hide from her until she is
 At last the tattered remnant of a mare,
 Sped to her death by senseless cruelties;
 But to her state Orlando pays no heed
 As on his madman's way he runs with speed.

72

Although the mare is dead, he drags her still,
 Proceeding on his course towards the West;
 Continuing to plunder, sack and kill,
 He takes whatever suits his purpose best,
 Fruit, meat or bread, provided he can fill
 His paunch; a gruesome and unwelcome guest,
 At every house he left some dead, some lame,
 Then onward passed as quickly as he came.

73

He would have dealt likewise (and thought it right)
 With his fair lady, had she not been hid;
 For he could not distinguish black from white,
 Believing good the evil which he did.
 Curst be the ring and curst be, too, the knight
 Who gave it to her! Else had we been rid
 Of her, and by Orlando, at one stroke:
 Just vengeance for the many hearts she broke.

74

And would not only *she* were in his hands,
 But all the women in the world today!
 Unkind to all their lovers in all lands,
 There is no scrap of good in them, I'd say.
 But now my grief my slackened strings expands
 So that discordant melodies I play.
 My song till later on I will defer,
 When less displeasing it may be to hear.

CANTO XXX

1

When passions too much freedom are allowed,
 When reason, overcome by rage, submits,
 When our best judgement angry feelings cloud,
 When tongue insults, or hand strikes out and hits
 Our dearest friends, if then our head is bowed
 In penitence, no tearful sigh acquits
 Us of the wrong which we have done; in vain
 I grieve to think my words have given pain.

2

But I am like a sick and ailing man
 Who, after suffering for many years
 In patience ever since his ill began,
 No longer can endure the pain he bears:
 He yields to rage, and curses all he can.
 The pain subsides: his anger disappears.
 Aghast, he lies repentant on his bed,
 But what was said cannot be now unsaid.

3

I hope, sweet ladies, you will pardon me.
 I trust that you will favour me this much,
 For in the anguish of my malady
 My wits went wandering, and I lost touch.
 So pardon me and blame my enemy
 On whose account my suffering is such
 My state could not be worse, and God above
 Knows how she wrongs me; *she* knows how I love.

4

I am deranged, just as Orlando was,
 And I deserve to be excused no less.
 Up hill, down dale, he rushes without pause.
 Marsilio's kingdom sees him onward press.
 The battered carcass of the mare he draws
 For days behind him in his stubbornness.
 Arriving where a river ends its course,
 He is obliged at last to leave the horse.

5

And, swimming like an otter through the flood,
 He soon emerged upon the other side,
 And to the water's edge a shepherd rode
 That there his horse might drink; and when he spied
 Orlando coming, all alone and nude,
 He had no fear of him and did not hide.
 'I want that nag of yours,' the madman said,
 'And in exchange I'll give you mine; she's dead.

6

'She's lying there upon the other bank.
 Look, you can see her easily from here.
 I don't know why it is, but down she sank,
 But you can put her right again, it's clear.
 She has no other blemish, so I'll thank
 You for your nag, and something else to square
 The bargain; pray dismount.' With no reply
 Except a laugh, the shepherd passes by.

7

'Did you not hear? I want that nag of yours,'
 Orlando shouted, running after him.
 The shepherd, who proceeded on his horse
 To where the river dwindled to a stream,
 Struck out with a stout cudgel to endorse
 His scorn and laid his heavy blows with vim.
 Orlando, roused to rage, drove his fist full
 Upon the shepherd's head and broke his skull.

8

He leaps into the saddle and is gone.
 He robs, he sacks, he plunders and he slays.
 He gives the nag no rest, but drives it on.
 Deprived of nourishment, in a few days
 It too expires and joins the other one.
 But not for this the Count on foot delays,
 For every mount he happens on he uses,
 First killing any rider who refuses.

9

At Malaga the damage which he does
 Is worse than all his ravages elsewhere.
 Sacking and plundering without a pause,
 He brings the population to despair.
 The havoc which his devastations cause
 Will not be remedied for many a year.
 He burns or ruins, throughout Malaga,
 One third of all the habitations there.

10

Rampaging on, at length Orlando came
 To Algeciras, situated close
 Beside the strait which some Gibraltar name,
 But others, other appellations use.
 A boat the madman spied (whom none could tame),
 Laden with trippers who this moment chose
 Upon the tranquil sea to take their ease,
 Refreshed and solaced by the morning breeze.

11

Orlando in his madness shouted 'Wait!',
 Desiring suddenly to go on board.
 Not for such cargo would the boat abate
 Its speed, for all he bellowed, yelled and roared,
 But skimmed across the sea at such a rate
 No swallow swooped more rapidly or soared.
 Orlando beats and urges on his horse
 And to the water kicks it on its course.

12

And willy-nilly the poor steed at last
Must yield, despite its preference for land.
The water, reaching to its knees, then passed
Its belly, next its rump, then soon had gained
The level of its head, which vanished fast.
Prevented from returning to the strand,
It had to swim to Africa, or sink –
Quite a dilemma for the beast, I think.

13

Orlando can no longer see the boat
Which prompted him to leave the Spanish shore;
Too far away the merry-makers float
Beyond the water's rim; yet all the more
He urges on the steed, though it is not
A sea-horse, as he might have seen before.
Not breath but water fills its lungs, and so
It finishes its swim, and life, below.

14

It sank below and almost took as well
The madman on its back, but just in time
He lifted both his arms; breasting the swell,
He struck out vigorously with each limb,
And puffed the water from his face; to tell
The truth, the gentle air assisted him,
For if the elements that day had frowned,
The paladin Orlando would have drowned.

15

But Fortune, who takes care of the insane,
Deposited the Count on Ceuta's coast.
For some time near the city he had lain
(A distance of two arrow-shots almost),
When eastwards he began to run again,
For many days, until a dark-skinned host
He found, in tents, encamped beside the sea,
Vast and unending as infinity.

16

Now let us leave the paladin to roam.
There will be time to speak of him anon;
And as to what, my lord, will now become
Of fair Angelica, so timely flown,
And how she will at last regain her home,
Finding a well-found ship to travel on,
And how she'll make Medoro India's king,
A lyre more resonant than mine may sing.

17

I have so many other things to say
That I no longer wish to follow her,
But to the Tartar king will make my way,
Whose rival could no longer interfere
When with his love in sweet content he lay.
In all of Europe none her equals were,
Now that the fair Angelica was gone
And Isabella's soul to Heaven had flown.

18

But Mandricardo, though he could rejoice,
Could not experience in full as yet
The benefit of Doralice's choice.
His pride had other challenges to meet.
One has been uttered by Ruggiero's voice,
Claiming the eagle on his banneret.
Gradasso too, the king of Sericana,
Will not renounce his claim to Durindana.

19

King Agramante does the best he can
And King Marsilio assists as well,
But neither of them hits upon a plan
Such enmity and rivalry to quell;
Ruggiero and the Sericanian
Continue to be adamant as steel.
The sacred bird once borne on Hector's shield,
Orlando's sword, these heroes will not yield.

92

And when he heard that all their enemies
Were killed or scattered, and that both were free,
And that it was Ruggiero and Marfise
Who helped to rescue them from jeopardy,
And that his brother had returned with his
Two cousins, that they had been saved, all three –
Young Richard, Malagigi, Vivian –
He'd hastened eagerly to Montalban.

93

And so he came to Montalbano, where
His mother, wife and children he embraced,
His brothers and his cousins too, who were
The captives of Lanfusa, now released.
And when they saw their kinsman thus appear
They were like fledgling swallows when at last
The mother bird returns with nourishment.
After some days, away with him there went:

94

Richard, Alardo, Ricciardetto and
The eldest son, Guicciardo, with the two
Young cousins; six of them, a warlike band,
Clad in full armour, muster for review,
Then ride behind Rinaldo, as he planned.
But Bradamante, since the time was due
(She hoped) when Fate her longing would fulfil,
Did not go with them, saying she was ill.

95

Indeed, she spoke the truth, for she was sick,
But not of bodily disease or pain.
Ardent desire had left her spirit weak,
For all her hopes and longings were in vain.
Rinaldo rode away with all the pick
Of knights and men-at-arms of Montalban;
And how he came to Paris and brought aid
To Charles, in the next canto will be said.

CANTO XXXI

1

What sweeter bliss and what more blessed state
Can be imagined than a loving heart,
With happiness and joy inebriate,
Possessed, in thrall to Love in every part,
But for the torment which Man suffers, that
Suspicion, sinister and deep, that smart,
That aching wretchedness, that malady,
That frenzied rage, which we call jealousy?

2

All other bitterness which may arise
To temper the excess of so much sweet,
The joys of love augments and multiplies,
Refining them and making them complete.
Water more exquisitely satisfies
When we are thirsty; hunger what we eat
Improves; Man cannot relish peace before
He has experienced a state of war.

3

If eyes do not behold what the heart keeps
For ever visible, this can be borne.
Absence, however long a lover weeps,
Heightens but more the joy of the return.
Service, unwavering and true, which reaps
No recompense, provided hope still burn,
This too can be endured, though it is hard:
A lover in the end has his reward.

4

Rejection, scorn and all the pains of love,
 The sufferings which last for many a year,
 Can, when recalled, increase the pleasure of
 More joyful times when Fate is less severe.
 But that dread poison nothing can remove
 From a sick mind, for none is deadlier.
 No happiness, no merriment avails
 To cure a jealous lover of his ills.

5

This is that poisoned wound for which there are
 No potions, unguents, salves or antidotes;
 No secret charm, no magic formula
 Such as the book of Zoroaster quotes,
 No vigil for a favourable star,
 No cabbalistic sign which power denotes,
 Not all the magic arts, could heal that sore
 For which, alas! death is the only cure.

6

Implacable and life-destroying wound,
 How soon you fester in a lover's breast!
 Suspicion, indiscriminate, beyond
 All reasoning, of ills the cruellest,
 The intellect you darken and confound
 Till true is false, and false, truth manifest!
 Ah, Jealousy, more cruel than the grave,
 What pain in store for Bradamant you have!

7

First, what her brother and Ippalca said
 Had pierced her tender heart with bitter woe.
 Next, tidings still more terrible and dread,
 Which after a few days she came to know,
 Caused her more sorrow, and more tears she shed;
 But this was nothing to a further blow
 Which fell, as I'll explain; but now I must
 To Paris, with Rinaldo and his host.

8

Late on the second day they met a knight
 Who had a lady at his side; his shield
 And surcoat were of black, save that a white
 Bend sinister traversed the sable field.
 He challenged Ricciardetto to a fight,
 Who, riding fearlessly ahead, revealed
 A readiness to take him at his word
 (And he was never one to have demurred).

9

So, from the distance which the rules demand,
 They ride to the encounter at top speed
 (Asking no names), while all the others stand
 To see which valiant horseman will succeed.
 'I'll soon unseat him', Ricciardetto planned
 (So saying, he was confident indeed),
 'If I can strike him in my usual way.'
 But the reverse result occurred that day.

10

For *he* was struck beneath the visor hard
 By the black cavalier, of name unknown,
 And, lifted from the saddle, off his guard,
 Two lance-lengths from his charger he was thrown;
 And to avenge his brother, next Alard
 At once took up the challenge; he was soon
 Unseated, and so potent was the shock
 Of the encounter that his shield it broke.

11

Straightway Guicciardo put his lance in rest,
 Observing his two brothers on the ground.
 Although Rinaldo shouted, 'Wait! Desist!
 I am the third. Let *me* fight the third round,'
 Guicciardo paid no heed to his request.
 Spurring his horse, he rode full tilt, but found
 (Before Rinaldo had his helmet on)
 That like his brothers he was also thrown.

12

Ricciardo, Malagigi, Vivian
 All clamoured to avenge the fallen three.
 Rinaldo quelled the quarrel which began.
 Already armed, he said, 'Leave this to me.
 Our duty is in Paris with Charlemagne.
 There is no time to wait for you to be'
 (But these last words he did not say outright)
 'Defeated one by one by this strange knight.'

13

(If he had made these last remarks out loud
 He would have given serious offence.)
 The two opponents took the space allowed
 According to the rules of such events
 And, turning, to the harsh encounter rode.
 Rinaldo now displays his excellence:
 He does not fall; like glass both lances break,
 Both cavaliers the impact fails to shake.

14

Quite other is the case with the two steeds
 As to the ground their cruppers are brought low.
 Rising at once, Baiardo onward speeds,
 His course uninterrupted by the blow.
 The stranger's horse, unequal to such deeds,
 Its spine and shoulder smashed, no more will go
 To war; the knight, perceiving it is dead,
 Leaps free, prepared to fight on foot instead.

15

And to Count Aymon's son who, turning now,
 Approached him empty-handed, he thus spoke:
 'So fine a charger I cannot allow
 To lie there unavenged, and you who broke
 His back shall pay the penalty, I vow,
 For having robbed me of him by this stroke.
 So now advance and do your worst, I pray,
 For you and I must settle this today.'

16

Rinaldo answered, 'If a destrier
 Is all there is between us, then take one
 Of mine instead; you'll find it, I declare,
 Of no less use and value than your own.'
 'You must be dense', replied the cavalier,
 'If you believe that you can thus atone.
 But if you do not see why I must fight,
 I'll set it down for you in black and white.'

17

'It would be counter to the code if I
 Did not contend with sword as well as lance.
 My honour is impugned unless we try
 Our prowess also in this second dance.
 So, as you please, dismount or stay on high;
 I am prepared to give you every chance,
 And whatsoever benefit you will,
 So eager am I for this test of skill.'

18

Rinaldo did not keep him in suspense.
 'I promise you this test,' he said, 'and so
 That you may feel no doubt, I will dispense
 With all my men-at-arms and bid them go
 Ahead until I come'; he sent them hence
 (Save for a page to hold his horse), to show
 Good faith; for, in all matters chivalrous,
 No cavalier was more punctilious.

19

This courtesy of the brave paladin
 Commends him greatly to the unknown knight.
 On foot, Rinaldo gives Baiardo's rein
 To the young page, who leads him out of sight;
 And when the standard can no more be seen,
 Rinaldo, ready for this second fight,
 Takes shield and sword, an eager challenger,
 And shouts defiance at the cavalier.

20

The battle which between them then began
 Appeared unequalled in ferocity.
 Neither opponent thinks the other can
 Resist so long, but each is proved to be
 As good a warrior, as brave a man.
 Neither rejoices yet in victory,
 But neither combatant surrender will:
 To gain advantage both use all their skill.

21

The blows, so merciless and obdurate,
 Breaking the corners of the heavy shields,
 Now slashing mail, now smashing armour plate,
 While both no progress make, and neither yields,
 With horrifying sounds reverberate.
 Both in attack and in defence each wields
 His sword, and grimly each resolves to make
 (For this might well be fatal) no mistake.

22

The combat lasted for one hour and more
 Than half the next; the sun had sunk below
 The western waters, to the farthest shore
 The shadows spread, but in the afterglow,
 Taking no moment's respite to restore
 Their strength, giving and taking blow on blow,
 The warriors continue; not for rage
 Or rancour, but for honour they engage.

23

Rinaldo wonders who this unknown youth
 Can be, so bold, so stalwart and so strong.
 Not only does he stand his ground, in truth
 He presses his opponent hard and long.
 By now the paladin would not be loath
 (If honour could defended be from wrong),
 Such the exertion is and such the heat,
 To end the fight, or call a halt to it.

24

And, for his part, the unknown cavalier –
 Who, likewise, did not know the other's name,
 Who did not know this paladin and peer,
 Rinaldo Montalbano, of great fame,
 Whom opposite he saw and very near
 With sword in hand – to the conclusion came
 That this was someone of great excellence,
 Unparalleled in his experience.

25

And of that pledge he'd gladly now be free
 Which he had taken to avenge his horse.
 If without fear of blame or calumny
 He could withdraw, he would prefer that course.
 Too desperate he deems the jeopardy.
 The shadows his misgivings now endorse,
 For almost all the blows exchanged miscarry
 And scarcely can they see to thrust or parry.

26

Rinaldo was the first to speak the word
 Which called a halt; but, he went on to say,
 Let them regard the combat as deferred
 Till slow Arcturus paled at break of day;
 And, in the meantime, until this occurred,
 The unknown knight should with Rinaldo stay,
 Where he would be an honoured, welcome guest,
 Well served, well squired, where he could safely rest.

27

To these proposals which Rinaldo made
 The courteous cavalier at once agreed;
 And now together through the darkling glade
 To where the troops have halted they proceed.
 All honour to the unknown knight is paid.
 Rinaldo picks for him a handsome steed,
 With splendid trappings, tested, tried and trained,
 Which much experience in war has gained.

28

The warrior, who was unknown, now knows
 It is Rinaldo who escorted him,
 For on the way he happened to disclose
 His name; since from one origin they stem
 (For they are brothers), each affection shows
 At this discovery; their eyes now brim
 With tears of joy and tenderness and love,
 As overwhelming these new feelings prove.

29

Guidon Selvaggio is this warrior's name
 And you have heard me speak of him before,
 When Sansonetto and Marfisa came
 With Oliver's two sons and, making war
 On Orontea's realm, saved him from shame.
 Since then, that felon Pinabello more
 Humiliation had imposed on him,
 Making him implement his lady's whim.

30

And when Guidone understood at last
 That this Rinaldo was, that famous knight
 Who in his fame all other knights surpassed,
 Whom, as the blind desire to see the light,
 He'd longed to see, 'What fortune has thus cast
 My lot,' he said, 'that I was led to fight
 With you whom I so ardently admire,
 Whom but to serve and honour I aspire?'

31

'Costanza gave me birth, on the far shore
 Of the Black Sea, the seed, as you were too,
 Of that illustrious progenitor,
 Aymon of Montalbano; when I knew
 I was your kin, such was my longing for
 My brothers' company, I sought for you.
 I am Guidon; my only purpose was
 To honour you, but pain to you I cause.

32

'Yet for my error, my excuse shall be:
 I did not recognize my kith and kin.
 If I can make amends for this, tell me
 What I must do; I'm eager to begin.'
 And when they had embraced repeatedly
 And of each other's love assured had been,
 Rinaldo answered, 'Seek no more, I pray,
 To ask my pardon for our fight today:

33

'Nothing could better testify to us
 You are a true branch of our ancient stock,
 Nothing convince us like your valorous
 Resistance in the battle's clash and shock;
 But you would not have found us credulous
 If quiet and pacific were your look:
 Hinds are not offspring of the king of beasts,
 No doves were ever hatched in eagles' nests.'

34

Proceeding, they continue to converse;
 Conversing, they proceed upon their way.
 Soon as Rinaldo has re-joined his peers,
 He tells them who Guidone is, and they,
 Who long have hoped to welcome him as theirs,
 Rejoice to learn he has arrived that day;
 And as around Guidone they assembled,
 They said how much his father he resembled.

35

How welcome by his kinsfolk he was made,
 How brothers, cousins, clasped him by the hand,
 What joyful homage all the others paid,
 How gladly they received him in their band,
 What he to them and what to him they said,
 I shall not tell you, but you understand,
 In spite of all these things I do not say,
 That he *persona grata* was that day.

36

Welcome Guidone would have been indeed
 At any time, of this I am quite sure;
 But since he had arrived in time of need,
 His coming gladdened all their hearts the more.
 When shadows at the break of day recede,
 And the new sun, rising from Ocean's floor,
 Is circled with an aureole of light,
 Guidone and his kin go forth to fight.

37

Two days they travel on, at such a pace
 That soon they find themselves beside the Seine,
 Ten miles or so from Paris; in that place
 Gismonda's sons Guidone sees again,
 Accoutred each in his strong carapace,
 Which weapons seek to penetrate in vain:
 Grifon the White and Aquilant the Black,
 Who nothing of the knightly virtues lack.

38

A damsel earnestly conversed with them;
 Of no mean rank she seemed, for she was clad
 In a white samite robe, which round the hem
 A gold-embroidered decoration had.
 Although her beauty sparkled like a gem,
 Her tearful eyes proclaimed that she was sad.
 Her gestures, bearing, aspect, all conveyed
 A grave significance in what she said.

39

Guidone and the sons of Oliver
 Have recognized each other straight away;
 Not long ago all three together were.
 Guidone to Rinaldo turns to say,
 'Here are two knights for you; we cannot err
 If they will side with Charlemagne today.
 We'll put to flight all pagans with those two.'
 Rinaldo says that what he says is true.

40

He too has recognized them at first sight,
 For he remembers how they used to ride,
 One surcoat black, the other surcoat white,
 With blazoning ornate and beautified.
 They, for their part, with manifest delight,
 To greet Guidone with each other vied,
 His brothers, cousins, eagerly embraced,
 Rinaldo too, laying all hate to rest.

41

They had been enemies, but why and how
 (The fault was Truffaldino's) would take long
 To say; embracing one another now,
 And setting memories of wrath among
 Forgotten things, to lend their aid they vow.
 To Sansonetto, who next joins the throng,
 Rinaldo gladly all due honour pays,
 For of his valour he has heard great praise.

42

The damsel, knowing every paladin,
 Had recognized Rinaldo drawing near.
 As soon as she was able to begin,
 She told him tidings he was sad to hear.
 'My lord,' she said, 'your cousin I have seen,
 Of Church and Empire, champion and peer:
 Orlando, once a man for every season,
 So wise and so renowned, has lost his reason.'

43

'How this has come about I cannot say,
 Nor why he wanders witless all around.
 I saw his sword and other arms, which lay
 Thrown here and there, neglected, on the ground.
 I saw a cavalier who passed that way,
 Who in compassion gathered all he found,
 Who hung them one by one upon a tree,
 As a memorial, in piety.'

44

'That very day Orlando's sword was gone,
Taken – consider what a grievous loss –
By Mandricardo, Agricane's son.
It is a serious affront to us
That Durindana, of all swords the one
We prize the most, should to the infamous
Return; and Brigliadoro, wandering,
Was also taken by the pagan king.

45

'I saw Orlando a few days ago
Running quite naked, witless, without shame,
Uttering terrifying shrieks; and so
To this conclusion with regret I came:
Orlando has gone mad; and this I know
(Though I should never have believed the same)
For I have seen him.' She went on to tell
How from the bridge Orlando wrestling fell.

46

'To everyone I judge to be his friend
And not his enemy, I speak of this,'
She added, 'for I hope that in the end,
By pity moved for what has gone amiss,
Someone the Count may rescue, and defend,
Till he is cured, from all hostilities.
I know if Brandimarte hears the news,
All speed and every effort he will use.'

47

For this was Fiordiligi, the sweet wife
Of Brandimarte, whom she long had sought;
And he loved her more dearly than his life.
She added that Orlando's sword had brought
Ferocious rivalry and bitter strife
Among the pagans; how the Tartar fought
And died, and how the weapon had then passed
Into Gradasso's eager hands at last.

48

On hearing of this strange calamity,
Rinaldo weeps and cannot be consoled.
As ice is melted to fluidity
By the hot sun, his heart, so brave and bold,
Is liquefied by grief; the memory
Of what Orlando was and did of old
Makes him resolve to bring his cousin home
And cure his ills, wherever he may roam.

49

But first, since Heaven or the hand of Chance
Has here assembled all this mighty host,
Rinaldo is determined to advance
Upon the Moors, who have surrounded most
Of Paris, but he does not move at once.
To make the pagans pay a higher cost,
He waited till the dark of night was deep
And Lethe's water sprinkled was by Sleep.

50

He placed his men-at-arms about the glade
And at their stations ordered them to stay
Until Apollo his departure made
And to his ancient nurse moved on his way;
When bears and goats and serpents were displayed,
No longer hidden by the lamp of day,
Rinaldo moved his silent forces on,
As pagans slumbered in oblivion.

51

And with him came Grifone, Aquilant,
Guidone, Viviano and Alard,
And Sansonet, a mile or so in front,
With quiet steps and speaking not a word.
Finding the sentinels of Agramant
Asleep, they did not spare a single guard;
Not one was taken prisoner; unseen,
Unheard, they crept among the Saracen.

52

Rinaldo takes the vanguard by surprise
 And his destruction of it is complete,
 For not a man is there but falls and dies.
 Having no time to rally or retreat,
 The pagans do not smile; since in their eyes
 The future will not joyful be or sweet;
 For half asleep, unarmed and ill-prepared,
 Badly against such warriors they fared.

53

To terrify the Saracens still more,
 Rinaldo gave the signal for a blast
 Of clarions and trumpets; with a roar
 Of 'Montalbano!' his supporters passed.
 Over the barricades Baiardo bore
 His master with one leap; then forward fast,
 Trampling the fallen bodies, on they went,
 Till no pavilion stood and scarce one tent.

54

Not one among the pagans was so brave
 But that his hair stood upright on his head;
 Soon as they heard the shout the Christians gave -
 That formidable name, inspiring dread -
 Spaniards and Africans alike, to save
 Their precious skins, from their encampments sped.
 On loading packs no precious time is wasted,
 When once the fury of the foe is tasted.

55

Guidone follows him and does no less;
 No less achieve the sons of Oliver;
 Alardo, Ricciardetto, onward press,
 And horror the two other brothers stir;
 Vivian and Aldigiero spread distress
 With Sansonetto as a harbinger.
 And every knight who rallies to the sign
 Brings yet more glory to the Clairmont line.

56

Of Montalbano's farmers and their sons
 Rinaldo gathered seven hundred men.
 Ferocious as Achilles' Myrmidons,
 In winter's cold, in summer's heat they train;
 No man among them but his armour dons
 As soon as danger to their lord is seen.
 One hundred would against a thousand stand -
 A loyal, valorous and gallant band.

57

Rinaldo is not rich, in property
 Or money, but his frank and open ways,
 His readiness to share whatever he
 Possesses, mean that every soldier stays
 With him, unshaken in his loyalty,
 Although a higher wage another pays.
 Rinaldo never moves these troops unless
 An urgent need arises somewhere else.

58

But since King Charlemagne has need of aid,
 Rinaldo now denudes his citadel,
 Taking his soldiers with him, as I said.
 Against the Africans they fight so well,
 No cruel wolf more fierce an onslaught made
 When on the woolly-coated sheep it fell
 By the Galaesus, no lion among the goats
 Beside the Cinyphus e'er ripped more throats.

59

King Charles, to whom Rinaldo had sent word,
 Knew that assistance would be soon at hand;
 When of the night attack he also heard,
 He armed in readiness to help the band.
 When need arose, his paladins he stirred
 To action (two were still in Paris) and
 The son of Monodante, whom the fair
 Young Fiordiligi loved, as he loved her,

60

Whom she for many days had sought in vain,
 Wandering here and there throughout all France.
 As soon as she beheld his emblem plain,
 She recognized him from afar at once.
 When Brandimarte saw his love again,
 Setting aside all thoughts of spear and lance,
 He hastened to embrace her, and above
 A thousand kisses showered on his love.

61

In olden days they seemed to place great trust
 In women, whether middle-aged or young;
 Permitted to indulge their wander-lust,
 They travelled unaccompanied along
 Strange roads, up hill, down dale, from coast to coast,
 But those at home suspected nothing wrong.
 Fair Fiordiligi started to relate
 What she had witnessed of Orlando's state.

62

Such tidings he would scarcely credit if
 He heard them from another messenger;
 But he believes his beautiful young wife
 (Far more than this he had believed of her).
 Not only did she hear, but large as life
 She saw with her own eyes, as she can swear,
 Orlando mad, the Count whom she knows well;
 And where and when she now proceeds to tell.

63

She tells him of the bridge which Rodomont
 Has built and holds as a pass perilous,
 And of the tomb she also gives account,
 With surcoats and with arms made sumptuous;
 And she describes how she has seen the Count
 Commit the wildest and most furious
 Of follies, how he wrestled with the Moor,
 And fell into the river, and much more.

64

And he who loved Orlando as a friend,
 As ever brothers or a father loved,
 As soon as Fiordiligi reached an end,
 Resolved to search for him, as it behoved.
 No hardship and no jeopardy should bend
 His will from finding him, where'er he roved,
 And to seek help for him from a physician,
 Or else, if that should fail, from a magician.

65

Armed as he is and mounted on his horse,
 He leaves with Fiordiligi as his guide.
 Day after day they journey on their course
 Until they reach the bridge where many tried
 To cross and, failing, lost their arms, or worse,
 Their lives. Alerted by the guard inside
 The tower, Rodomonte takes his stand
 As soon as Brandimarte nears the strand.

66

As soon as Rodomonte saw him come,
 He matched his fury with a direful voice:
 'Whoever you may be, who to your doom
 Are here misled by Fate, whence I rejoice,
 Dismount! Disarm! Here to this sacred tomb
 Pay tribute; do not thank me, for no choice
 I give you: I will slay you in a trice
 And offer you as the next sacrifice.'

67

No other answer Brandimarte gave
 Than with his lance; and spurring on his steed,
 Batoldo, loyal, spirited and brave,
 He rode against the pagan at such speed
 And with such courage, he was seen to have
 That valour which the knightly virtues breed.
 And Rodomonte, as his foe approached,
 Thundered across the bridge, his weapon couched.

68

So many times had Rodomonte's horse
 Traversed the narrow bridge, from which now one
 And now another knight was flung by force,
 Secure, unfaltering he galloped on.
 Batoldo, unaccustomed to the course,
 Trembled in every sinew, nerve and bone.
 The bridge was trembling too as on they rode,
 And seemed about to fall beneath their load.

69

Both cavaliers are masters of the joust.
 As thick as tree-trunks both their lances are.
 The heavy blows they strike, to their great cost,
 Are heavier than they have struck so far.
 Though strong and skilled, the horses cannot trust
 Their mighty frames to save them from the jar.
 Their balance being unsettled, down they slip,
 Both riders falling with them in a heap.

70

Both horses struggle to rise up again,
 Urged by the spurs which both the knights apply.
 So narrow is the bridge, they strive in vain
 To find a foothold; neither can defy
 The force of gravity, howe'er they strain.
 They fall with such a splash, the sound on high
 Re-echoes, as when in our river Po
 Apollo's son, Phaëthon, fell below.

71

The horses carry with them on their backs
 The weight of the two knights, who sit erect.
 Total immersion neither of them lacks.
 The bottom of the river they inspect
 As though they followed in a naiad's tracks.
 The pagan found it easy to direct
 His underwater steed, for more than once
 They have descended to these crystal haunts.

72

He knows where all the mud-banks are, and where
 The water's deep or shallow; head and breast
 And thighs at last emerge into the air.
 But Brandimarte does not pass this test.
 The river's current whirls him here and there.
 Batoldo, sinking in the sand, sinks fast.
 He tries to extricate himself, but down
 He sinks again, till both, it seems, must drown.

73

The tumbling water turns them downside-up
 And thus they float (as Turpin tells the tale),
 The rider underneath, the horse on top;
 And from the bridge, the damsel, deathly pale,
 With sighs and sobs and tears, which never stop,
 To Rodomonte utters this appeal:
 'For her whose memory you so revere,
 Be not so cruel! Save my cavalier!

74

'Ah! courteous knight, if love you ever knew,
 On me have pity, who so love this knight.
 Make him your prisoner, as is your due.
 Adorn this sepulchre, as is your right,
 With this fair banner, fairer far than you
 Have ever conquered here in any fight.'
 So well she pleads, the cruel pagan king
 Is moved to pity by her suffering.

75

And to the aid of Brandimart, immersed,
 He ran, and not too soon; the knight by then
 Had fully quenched his (non-existent) thirst,
 And wondered if he'd ever see again
 The light of day; but Rodomonte, first
 Relieving him of helm and sword, by main
 Force dragged him, almost lifeless, to the shore
 And locked him, among many, in the tower.

76

All joy had died in Fiordiligi's breast,
 To see her lover led away and bound,
 Though she consoled herself to think at least
 In spite of everything he had not drowned.
 The blame was hers, she inwardly confessed
 (And this her grief with sharper sorrow crowned),
 For she had told her love, and only she,
 About Orlando's grievous malady.

77

The damsel rode away, for she had planned
 To fetch Rinaldo, Sansonetto, or
 Guidone, or another of their band,
 Well-versed in every skill and art of war,
 As nimble in the water as on land,
 Who, if he was to overcome the Moor,
 If not of greater strength, must be possessed
 Of better fortune than her love at least.

78

She journeys on her quest for a long way
 Before she meets with any cavaliers
 Who in her view those qualities display
 Which are essential for this task of hers.
 She searches here and there until one day
 She sees a knight approaching her who wears
 A surcoat brodered with a fair design
 Of cypress-trees, ornate and rich and fine.

79

But I will tell you later who this was,
 For now my purpose is to take you back
 To Paris, where the pagans have good cause
 To flee before Rinaldo's fierce attack.
 I cannot count them all, nor number those
 Who are despatched for ever to the black
 Infernal shores of Styx; though Turpin tried,
 Such inky darkness his attempt defied.

80

King Agramante, sleeping in his tent,
 Is wakened from his slumber by a knight.
 His capture, he declares, is imminent.
 He must as soon as possible take flight.
 The king looks round him in bewilderment.
 He sees his men and he observes their plight:
 Naked and helpless, running here and there,
 Having no time to arm or to prepare.

81

The king, confused, uncertain what to do,
 Allows his squire to fasten his cuirass,
 When Balugant, with others of that crew,
 Arrive to tell him what has come to pass.
 Grandonio and Falsirone, who
 Accompanies his son, all round him press,
 And on him urge the danger he is in:
 He will be fortunate to save his skin.

82

So does Marsilio; good Sobrino's voice
 Is mingled with the others there, to say
 That Agramant must flee; he has no choice,
 For ruin stares him in the face that day:
 Rinaldo comes, his followers rejoice.
 If Agramante now decides to stay,
 His fate, his allies' fate, he will ensure:
 Death or imprisonment they must endure.

83

Let him withdraw to Arles or to Narbonne,
 Together with such troops as still remain.
 Both fortresses are strong and either one
 A siege, if necessary, could sustain.
 When he is safe inside the garrison,
 He can regroup his forces once again,
 And every stratagem and means employ
 To take revenge and Charlemagne destroy.

84

King Agramante heeded their advice,
 Though harsh and bitter the decision was.
 So, to avoid a greater sacrifice,
 Along the road to Arles, without a pause,
 He went; wings seemed to waft him in a trice,
 Though, leaving in the dark, he had no cause
 To fear pursuit; thus from the net that day
 The wild-fowl (twenty thousand) got away.

85

But those Rinaldo and his brothers slew,
 And those the sons of Oliver laid low,
 And those who fell before the gallant few –
 The seven hundred – who allegiance owe
 To Montalbano, those whose death is due
 To Sansonetto, *their* sum who can know?
 One might as well attempt to count the flowers
 Which star the meadow after April showers.

86

Some think that Malagigi had a share
 In that night's triumph; so much butchery,
 So many bodies scattered everywhere,
 And broken heads, the work of sorcery
 Must be; from Tartarean regions drear
 He conjured up the Devil's cavalry,
 Of which the banners, destriers and lances
 The forces would outnumber of two Frances.

87

The crash of metal clashing, clattering,
 The rolling thunder of so many drums,
 So many thudding hoofs, the whinnying,
 The roar which from so many voices comes,
 O'er hill and plain and valley echoing,
 A tumult which all pandemoniums
 Exceeds must come from Hell, so it was said,
 And that was why the pagans turned and fled.

88

Ruggiero, whose condition was still grave,
 Was not forgotten by King Agramant,
 Who to his squires precise instructions gave
 To lay him on a steed which smoothly went
 Along the safest path; and next, to save
 Him pain or any untoward incident,
 They were to find a ship and thence on board
 Bring him to Arles to join the pagan horde.

89

Those who from Charles and from Rinaldo fled
 Numbered a hundred thousand, I believe,
 Or little less; o'er hill and dale they sped,
 And over wood and plain, in haste to leave
 The soil of France; and many stained it red
 Where it was clad with green; but I deceive
 You if I here omit Gradasso's name,
 Who from the farthest pavilion came.

90

For when he knows that Montalban is there,
 That it is he who marshals the assault,
 His joy is such he leaps into the air,
 For at this news he cannot but exult.
 He thanks his Maker that a chance so rare
 Has come his way; and he will not default.
 The longed-for moment has arrived at last
 To win Baiard, that charger unsurpassed.

91

Gradasso longed with all his royal pride
 (And this I think you have already heard)
 To flaunt Orlando's weapon at his side,
 And by the mad ambition too was stirred
 Upon that flawless destrier to ride.
 And so, this horse to mount, this weapon gird,
 He'd brought a hundred thousand men to France
 And had defied Rinaldo more than once.

92

And to the shore one day, where they agreed
 To see which of the two would come off best,
 Gradasso went, but did not then succeed
 In putting Montalbano to the test,
 For Malagigi made his cousin speed
 On board a ship (lured by illusion) lest
 He came to harm; and from that day to this
 The king suspected him of cowardice.

93

Thus when he knows that it is Montalban
 Who leads the assault, Gradasso feels delight.
 He dons his arms as quickly as he can
 And in pursuit rides off into the night;
 And indiscriminately every man
 Whom he encounters, be he Christian knight
 Or Saracen, of Libya, or France,
 Is laid low by the impact of his lance.

94

He sought Rinaldo here, he sought him there,
 Louder each time he challenged him by name,
 And to the centre of the turmoil, where
 The dead lay thickest on the field, he came.
 At last they meet, a formidable pair.
 Swords are their weapons, for each lance the same
 Fate overtakes: a thousand splinters rise
 To join the starry wagon of the skies.

95

And when he sees the valiant paladin
 He knows him straight away, beyond all doubt,
 Not by his banner (which he has not seen),
 But by the impact of his blows, without
 Compare, and by the destrier between
 His thighs; and he begins at once to shout
 Abuse, reproaching him because he fled
 And failed to keep the tryst they had agreed.

96

'You thought perhaps that if you hid that day',
 He said, 'you'd never meet me face to face;
 But, as you see, although you ran away,
 I have now caught you, and whatever place
 You chose, the furthest shores of Styx or, say,
 The highest sphere of Heaven, I would trace
 You (even if you rode your destrier),
 In darkness or in light, no matter where.

97

'But if your courage fails you once again,
 If, as before, you fear to fight with me,
 And if your honour you would rather stain
 Than risk your life, here is a remedy:
 Give me your charger, and alive remain,
 But go on foot; you don't deserve to be
 The owner of that horse if you refuse
 My challenge and a coward's part you choose.'

98

Two others near Rinaldo hear these words –
 Guidon and Ricciardetto – who at once,
 At the same moment, both unsheathe their swords
 In answer to the Sericanian's
 Abuse; but Montalbano turns towards
 Them and, to check their resolute advance,
 He says, 'Do you consider that without
 Your help the outcome is in any doubt?'

99

Then to the pagan monarch he replied,
 'Listen, Gradasso, I will make it clear
 That to the shore I came; I did not hide
 But kept my promise as a cavalier;
 Then I will prove by arms that you have lied,
 That what I tell you is the truth you hear.
 You will commit an act of calumny
 If you accuse me of unchivalry.

100

'But first, before we fight, attend, I pray,
And you shall hear my true and just excuse,
The reason why we did not meet that day,
And how unjustified is your abuse.
As for Baiard, it shall be as you say:
Your challenge for him I will not refuse,
But we must fight on foot and face to face,
As you decreed, and in some lonely place.'

101

The king of Sericana, courteous
As it behoves all cavaliers to be,
Whose heart, courageous and magnanimous,
Rejoices ever in true chivalry,
Follows Rinaldo without animus
Along a path beside the Seine, where he
With candour from the truth removes the veil,
All heaven being witness to his tale.

102

In further proof he calls for Buovo's son,
Who from his repertoire of magic charms
Recites in full again the very one
By which he drew his cousin from the harms
And perils of that day. 'Let us move on',
Rinaldo added then, 'to proof by arms.
What I have shown to be the truth by words,
I'll prove the more convincingly by swords.'

103

Gradasso, who desired at least to save
The first of the two reasons for dispute,
Accepted the excuse Rinaldo gave
(And any doubts he had he firmly put
Aside). This time, not where the waters lave
The shores of Barcelona is their route;
They choose a near-by fountain as their site,
Where they will meet next morning for their fight.

104

The terms are these: the destrier, Baiard,
Shall tethered be as trophy while they fight.
If he defeats his foe, the king's reward
Shall be to take the charger as his right;
But if Rinaldo presses him so hard
He has to choose between eternal night
And ignominy, then let him surrender
And to Rinaldo Durindana tender.

105

With great astonishment and greater grief
(As I have said) Rinaldo had heard tell
Of the disaster which (though past belief)
The greatest of the paladins befell.
The quarrel which broke out among the chief
Opponents of the Faith he also knew,
And thus he learned Gradasso had that blade
So famous by Orlando's prowess made.

106

When they had come to terms, Gradasso, though
Invited by Rinaldo to his tent,
Declined with thanks, for he preferred to go
To his own quarters, and away he went.
When in the East new light began to glow,
Both combatants were armed for the event
And to the fountain came, where they agreed
To fight for Durindana and the steed.

107

This duel which Rinaldo is to fight
With Sericana's monarch, hand to hand,
Is causing deep alarm in every knight
And fear in every soldier of his band.
Great is Gradasso's skill and great his might -
This they all know, and when they understand
He carries Durindana at his side,
Rinaldo's friends grow pale and terrified.

108

Viviano's brother, more than all the rest,
 Feared for his cousin's safety in this fray.
 He longed to put his magic to the test
 And every blow against Rinaldo stay;
 But though he was prepared to do his best,
 He did not want to vex the knight that day.
 He had incurred his anger once before
 When to the ship he lured him from the shore.

109

However much the others doubt and fear,
 Rinaldo goes off happy and secure.
 His reputation he now hopes to clear.
 Reproach, he finds, is bitter to endure.
 His foes of Altafaglia and Pontier
 Of arrogant pretensions he will cure.
 So, bold and confident, he goes his way,
 To win the triumph he expects that day.

110

From two directions the two combatants
 Arrive beside the fount near the same hour.
 First they embrace with friendly countenance,
 As if the king were a relation or
 At least a life-long friend of Montalban's.
 Their brows are so serene, none could be more.
 But what occurred when they began their fight
 I will defer until another night.

CANTO XXXII

I

I now remember (it had slipped my mind)
 I promised to enlarge upon that pang
 Of jealousy, and why the Maid repined.
 One cause of her uneasiness I sang.
 Then a new doubt, more subtle and refined,
 Torments her with a sharper, poisoned fang:
 The words of Ricciardetto so infest
 Her heart, it is consumed within her breast.

2

I meant to sing to you of her distress,
 When suddenly Rinaldo came between.
 Guidone next distracted me no less,
 Holding Rinaldo long, as you have seen.
 What with these two, and others, I confess
 Of Bradamant forgetful I have been.
 But I remember now, and will defer
 The duel I began, and sing of her.

3

And yet, before I tell you of her plight,
 I have to speak of Agramant again
 Who, after all the terrors of the night,
 Near Arles conducts such troops as still remain,
 For this, he thinks, is a convenient site
 To victual and regroup his forces; Spain
 Is near at hand and, opposite, the coast
 Of Africa he faces, with his host.

4

Through all his realm Marsilio recruits
 Fresh men-at-arms and horsemen, good and bad.
 In Barcelona every captain puts
 His ship in fighting order; some are glad
 To do so, for their purposes it suits.
 Each day the generals confer; to add
 To all these efforts, heavy taxes are
 Imposed on every town in Africa.

5

To Rodomont an offer has been sent:
 For bride he'll have a cousin of the king,
 Almonte's daughter, if he will consent
 To leave the bridge, and reinforcements bring
 To help the Moors in their predicament.
 With Rodomont there is no reasoning:
 Even Oran as dowry he refuses.
 To guard the lovers' sepulchre he chooses.

6

Marfisa does not copy him in this.
 When word of what has happened reaches her –
 The king defeated by his enemies,
 So many dead, or taken prisoner –
 She does not wait, but hastens where he is
 Encamped beside the river Rhône; and there
 She offers him her skill, her strength, her all,
 And on her loyal service bids him call.

7

She led Brunello captive in her train
 And gave him over to the king, unharmed.
 Marfisa had done nothing but detain
 Him for ten days; despondent and alarmed,
 He waited to be hanged by her or slain;
 But she, when no one challenged her in armed
 Dispute, unwilling now to soil her hands,
 Decided to release him from his bonds.

8

Instead of punishing his trickery,
 She brings him to King Agramant at Arles.
 You may imagine *his* delight that she
 Has come to fight for him against King Charles.
 In recognition of her loyalty,
 He has the thief Brunello seized, who snarls,
 And what she once desired the king to do
 By Agramante is attended to.

9

The hangman left him in a lonely place
 As food for vultures, as a meal for crows.
 Ruggiero, who once saved the villain's face
 And from his evil neck untied the noose,
 Is lying at this moment, by the grace
 Of God, upon his pallet; when he knows
 About Brunello's miserable fate,
 He cannot help the wretch, it is too late.

10

Meanwhile, fair Bradamante had bemoaned
 The long, slow passing of those twenty days
 Before Ruggiero was to keep his bond
 To her and to the Faith; but he delays,
 And, like a prisoner who long has groaned
 For liberty, her toll of tears she pays,
 Or like a patriot who long is banned
 From his beloved, smiling fatherland.

11

So slowly now the sun-god seemed to drive,
 She thought one of his horses must be lame.
 So slowly did the light of dawn arrive,
 A broken wheel must surely be to blame.
 No day so long did Joshua contrive,
 Who stopped the sun, as then her days became.
 The threefold night when Hercules was born
 Did not so long delay the languid morn.

12

How often did she envy as she wept
The dormouse and the badger and the bear!
For gladly all that time would she have slept,
And nothing hear or see, and never stir
Until Ruggiero to her chamber stepped
And with his voice and kiss awakened her;
But to achieve that was beyond her power
Who could not even sleep one single hour.

13

She turns and tosses on her bed all night,
The downy feathers granting no repose,
Or window-gazes, eager for the sight
Of fair Aurora, old Tithonus' spouse,
Who scatters in the path of morning light
Her tribute of the lily and the rose;
And when day rises she no less desires
To see the sky ablaze with starry fires.

14

When four or five days only must go by
Before the ending of the time agreed,
Hour after hour she waited for the cry
'Here comes Ruggiero on his mighty steed!'
Often she climbed a tower and from on high
She scanned the woods and fields, as if to read
The longed-for message there, or glimpse perchance
A cavalcade along the road from France.

15

If from afar the gleam of arms is seen,
Or rider who might be a cavalier,
Her eyes, her brow, once more become serene,
For this at last, she thinks, must be Ruggier;
Or if some figure trudges on the scene,
Unarmed, she takes him for his messenger.
Though many times she is deceived by hope,
She does not cease to be illusion's dupe.

16

Sometimes she puts on armour and sets out,
Descending from the castle to the plain;
Failing to meet him, by some other route
She thinks he must have come; and once again,
With undiminished hope, she turns about
And enters Montalbano, but in vain.
She seeks him here, she seeks him there; at last
The day when he had pledged to come has passed.

17

One day, then two, then three, then six, then eight,
Elapsed; at last they mounted to a score.
She, knowing nothing of her bridegroom's fate,
Was troubled by his absence more and more.
Her bitter cries would make compassionate
The snake-haired Furies on the Stygian shore.
The beauty of her eyes she does not spare,
Nor yet her snowy breast, her golden hair.

18

'Can it be true, alas!' she cried, 'that he
For whom I search, from me attempts to fly?
He whom I hold so dear, despises me?
And he whom I entreat, will not reply?
To one who hates, my heart in bond must be?
Does he esteem his qualities so high
That an immortal goddess is required
Before his unresponsive heart is fired?

19

'Knowing how much I love him, in his pride
He spurns me both as lover and as slave.
Knowing my sufferings, he stands aside
And in his cruelty will feign to save
Me after I am dead; as serpents hide,
Blocking their ears from music, so this brave
Heroic warrior keeps out of range,
Lest by my grief his evil heart I change.

20

'Ah, stay him, Lovel, who speeds from me so fast,
Whom I pursue with laggard steps and slow;
Or let me once again, as in the past,
About the world, a heart-free damsel go!
How foolish and fallacious was the trust
I had in you! Mercy you never show,
For it is your delight, your joy, your bliss,
To see your victims all reduced to this!

21

'But, in the end, of what do I complain
Except of my irrational desire,
Which lifts me far above the azure plain,
Until at last its pinions have caught fire?
My weight no longer able to sustain,
It drops me to the earth; then even higher
It raises me; its wings are singed anew;
To such repeated falls no end I view.

22

'And yet, my fault was greater, I must own;
For it was I who welcomed to my breast
A love which banished reason from its throne.
My powers are unequal to the test.
From bad to worse the charger bears me on;
I have no rein, I cannot check the beast.
It makes me realize my death is near,
To render life more difficult to bear.

23

'But why should I thus take myself to task?
My only error was in loving you.
What marvel was it that I could not mask
My feelings, or my female heart subdue?
Why should I shield myself, when I might bask
In manly beauty, grace, and wisdom too?
Such radiance as yours, how could I shun?
As well refuse to greet the rising sun!

24

'I was impelled, not only by my fate,
But by a sacred pledge that I would be
By a felicitous and blessed state
Rewarded for my love and constancy.
If now, I realize, alas!, too late,
That I was duped by a false prophecy,
Then Merlin I revile, him I reprove,
But never will I cease to love my love.

25

'Both Merlin and Melissa I will blame
Until the end of time, for by a spell
They showed me my descendants, to their shame,
As spirits conjured from the depths of Hell;
And of this trickery their only aim
Was to delude me - why, I cannot tell.
Perhaps they envied me my peace of mind.
No other reason for it can I find.'

26

Grief so possesses her, there is no place
In her whole body which is comforted.
Yet hope within her bosom still finds space.
Though she is sure that she has been misled,
The recollection of Ruggiero's face
And, when they parted, of the words he said,
Although no evidence can she discern,
Persuades her to believe he will return.

27

This hope sustains her after twenty days
Have passed, and for a month her grief is less
Acute; her expectation helps to raise
The heavy burdens which her soul oppress.
She wonders why Ruggiero still delays
But ever at the reason fails to guess;
Then, as she searches for him here and there,
Some tidings come which throw her in despair.

28

She met one day by chance a Gascon knight
 Who from the Africans had lately fled.
 He had been taken prisoner that night
 When the surprise attack Rinaldo led.
 She closely questioned him about the fight
 And listened eagerly to all he said.
 Then she enquired if he had seen her love
 And from that subject would not let him move.

29

He was acquainted with the pagan court
 And of the duel he was well aware.
 He gladly gave the Maid a full report:
 How Mandricard was killed and how Ruggier
 Had almost died, so badly was he hurt.
 And if his message had but stopped just there,
 This would have been a perfect alibi.
 Her eyes already she began to dry.

30

But he went on to say that a young maid,
 As fair as she was brave, Marfisa named,
 Had come to the encampment, bringing aid.
 For skill in battle she was justly famed.
 She and Ruggiero were in love, he said.
 They were together always, unashamed.
 They were betrothed, so everyone believed,
 And each the other's promise had received.

31

And when Ruggiero is quite well once more,
 The wedding will be published far and wide,
 And every leader, Saracen and Moor,
 By this announcement will be gratified.
 Nothing could please the pagans better, for
 They know the prowess of the pair; with pride
 And confidence a race of supermen
 They prophesy, such as were never seen.

32

The Gascon thought that what he said was true,
 And with good reason; every Saracen
 And every Moor believed the rumour too.
 The many indications that were seen,
 The mutual affection of the two,
 The origin of this belief had been.
 From mouth to mouth the story quickly spread
 That soon the loving couple would be wed.

33

That she had come to help King Agramant
 And reached the camp just when Ruggiero did,
 Confirmed the rumour; and although she went
 Away, taking Brunello, to be rid
 (And well rid) of the thieving miscreant,
 She had returned (as I have said) amid
 The Saracens, without being summoned there,
 Solely that she might see and tend Ruggier.

34

To visit him appeared her only aim,
 As he lay gravely wounded on his bed.
 Not only once but many times she came.
 All day beside him in his tent she stayed,
 And left, when evening fell, for her good name;
 And what was even stranger, people said,
 Though for her pride Marfisa was well known,
 To him a humble sweetness she had shown.

35

All this and more the Gascon verified.
 When Bradamante heard this terrible
 Account, the pain and grief which pierced her side
 Caused her such torment that she all but fell.
 Sadly she turned upon her homeward ride.
 Her rising jealousy she could not quell.
 All hope by rage was driven from her breast
 As to her room she hastened, to seek rest.

36

She does not stop to take her armour off,
But flings herself upon her bed, face down.
The bed-clothes in her mouth she tries to stuff,
Hoping by this her anguished cries to drown.
Ruggiero's absence caused her grief enough,
And now this Gascon has arrived to crown
Her misery; unable then to bear
Her grief, she thus gave vent to her despair:

37

'Alas! whom shall I ever trust again?
If you, my love, are cruel and untrue,
Untrue and cruel are all other men;
With all my heart and soul I trusted you.
What cruelty has ever caused such pain?
And in what ancient tragedy, or new,
Was such betrayal ever heard or shown?
What fate so undeserved was ever known?

38

'How does it come to pass that you, Ruggier,
In courage, beauty, valour, chivalry,
The paragon, the perfect cavalier,
Have not the virtue of fidelity?
In courtesy and grace you have no peer;
Your only blemish is inconstancy.
How is it that, of all the virtues this,
The greatest of them, you do not possess?

39

'Without this saving grace (did you not know?)
All other virtues of a noble knight
Remain unnoticed; for, how can one show
A thing of beauty where there is no light?
How easy to deceive a maid who so
Adored you as her idol, in whose sight
You were a god, and whom you could have told
(She trusting) that the sun was dark and cold!

40

'Ah, cruel one! Of what do you repent
If killing her who loves you will not cause
Remorse? If broken faith an incident
Of no account you hold, are there no laws
Which you respect? And if you so torment
A loving friend, how do you treat your foes?
There is no justice in this world, I know,
Nor yet in Heaven, if my revenge is slow.

41

'If more than any other sin Man hates
Ingratitude, knowing no keener smart,
And if for this, exiled from Heaven's gates,
The Light-bearer in darkness dwells apart,
And if grave punishment grave sin awaits,
When due repentance does not cleanse the heart,
Beware! On you harsh punishment descends
Who for ingratitude make no amends.

42

'Of theft, that crime most evil and most foul,
I also have good reason to complain.
I hold you guilty, not because you stole
My heart, for that will ever yours remain;
I mean the gift you made me of your soul,
Which now, ah cruel! you take back again.
Restore yourself to me, ignoble thief,
And be absolved of guilt and of my grief.

43

'You have abandoned me, but I from you,
Not even if I would, could never part.
But there remains one thing which I can do,
And will, to cure this pain within my heart:
My days I will now end, though they are few.
Would that the gods had not seen fit to thwart
Me in my last desire: to die while yet
Ruggiero loved me! Then had death been sweet.'

44

So saying, ready and disposed to die,
 She leaps up from her bed and draws her sword.
 Rage and despair within her bosom vie.
 She turns her weapon's deadly point toward
 Her breast upon the left-hand side, up high –
 But armour finds; her better self a word
 Now whispers in her heart: 'You, nobly born,
 Will thus incur eternal shame and scorn?

45

'Would it at least not be more suitable
 To die in battle, honoured on the field?
 If in the presence of Ruggier you fell,
 Your death might move his heart; if you were killed
 By him, could any woman die so well?
 – For by his deed your wish would be fulfilled;
 And right it were, if you by him were slain,
 Since he it is who fills your life with pain.

46

'Before you die, it may be you will wreak
 Revenge upon Marfisa, whose deceit
 And female wiles have caused your heart to break
 And from you your Ruggiero alienate.'
 These whisperings a good impression make
 Upon the Maid, who an elaborate
 Device invents, by which to signify
 Her desperation and resolve to die.

47

Her surcoat is the colour of the leaf
 Which fades when it is parted from the tree,
 Or sap no longer rises; and the chief
 Design consists of cypress-stumps, which she
 Selects as fit to represent her grief;
 For never they regain vitality,
 Once they are severed by the woodman's axe,
 Just as the Maid her source of life now lacks.

48

She takes the steed Astolfo used to ride.
 She takes his golden lance, which at a touch
 Unseats all combatants and flings them wide.
 The reason why Astolfo gave her such
 A horse and lance, on which he so relied,
 And how he first obtained them, would take much
 Too long to tell again. The Maid by chance
 Has chosen, unaware, the magic lance.

49

Taking no shield-bearer or company,
 She rode downhill and started on her way
 To Paris, for she thought the enemy
 Was still encamped outside and there would stay.
 No news had reached her of the strategy
 By which the siege was raised, nor of the fray
 In which Rinaldo slew the pagan horde,
 By Malagigi helped, and Charles's sword.

50

All Quercy and its capital, Cahors,
 She left; the mountain she had lost from view
 Where the Dordogne (her river) has its source,
 And close to Montferrand and Clermont drew,
 When all at once a lady on a horse,
 Serene of brow, benign and gracious too,
 Passed on ahead of her upon the road.
 Three knights, escorting her, beside her rode.

51

A train of squires and ladies came with her.
 Some rode in front and others rode behind.
 The Maid enquired of one who passed quite near,
 'Pray tell me, sir, if you will be so kind,
 Who is this lady?' 'As a messenger
 She has been sent from the Far North, to find
 The king of all the Franks,' the squire replied;
 'The Arctic seas to reach him she defied.'

52

'Our region, the "Lost Isle" some people call.
By others, Iceland it is also named.
Our queen by far the loveliest of all
Whom Heaven blessed with beauty is acclaimed.
She sends this shield to Charlemagne, who shall
Award it to that knight, of all those famed
For chivalry, whom he declares the best
In the whole world, by every proof and test.

53

'Since she esteems herself, and rightly so,
The loveliest of women, she will have
Only that cavalier whom she can know
To be above all others strong and brave;
And nothing her resolve can overthrow:
No man will she accept as husband save
That knight who in the lists is proved supreme.
It is for him she waits and only him.

54

'She hopes that at the famous court of France,
Where Charlemagne is ruler, such a knight
Is to be found, who with both sword and lance
Has proved a thousand times his skill and might.
The three who by the lady proudly prance
Are kings; their kingdoms I will now recite:
In Sweden, Gothland, Norway, they were crowned.
In skills of combat few are so renowned.

55

'These three, whose countries are less far-away
Than others from the Isle men call the Lost
(Because, according to what people say,
There are few mariners who know that coast),
Have been enamoured of our queen since they
First saw her, and desire at any cost
To marry her; for her, such things they've done
As shall for all eternity be known.

56

'But she the hand of no man will accept,
Unless above all others he excel.
"That in these regions you are proved adept",
She says to them, "is a poor test of skill.
Whoever wins, I grant is not inept:
A sun among the stars, he shines quite well.
But that does not entitle him to claim
A champion's renown, a hero's fame.

57

"To Charlemagne, whom I esteem and hold
In all the world to be the wisest lord,
I plan to send a costly shield of gold,
Which I expressly ask him to award
To the most valorous, to the most bold,
Of all who fight for him with lance or sword.
And be he knight or vassal, any man
I will accept if chosen by Charlemagne.

58

"When Charlemagne shall have received the shield
And given it to that courageous knight
Who is the champion of all who wield
Their sacred weapons in a holy fight;
Or if to one of you all others yield,
To whomsoever brings it back by right,
My hand and heart I offer in reward.
He will my husband be, my love, my lord."

59

'These words of hers induced the kings to come
To France, so distant from the Arctic main.
Each plans to take the golden trophy home,
Or by the winner vanquished be and slain.'
The Maid has listened silently and from
The tale she gathers all there is to glean.
Her courteous informant spurs his steed
And catches his companions up with speed.

60

She gladly lets him gallop on ahead,
Content to wend more slowly on her route.
Turning the contest over in her head,
Mischief, she sees, will be its only fruit.
Such rivalry as this is bound to lead
To enmity and discord and dispute
Among the paladins and others, if
King Charles agrees to countenance such strife.

61

This weighs upon her heart, but even more
She is cast down, oppressed and troubled by
The thought which weighed so heavily before
That in her grief she has resolved to die:
The love which once for her Ruggiero bore
Is now Marfisa's; she can scarce descry
The path, nor does she seek a night's abode,
So sunk is she beneath her sorrow's load.

62

And as a vessel, which an off-shore wind,
Or some mishap, has loosened from her berth,
The river's quiet reaches leaves behind,
Whirling unpiloted towards the firth,
So Bradamante wandered, with her mind
Fixed on Ruggiero, whom no power on earth
Made her forget; her thoughts were miles away
While Rabicano chose the course that day.

63

Raising her eyes at last, she sees the sun
Has turned his back on Mauretania's shore
And, diving like a goosander, has gone
To seek his ancient mother's lap once more.
And if she thinks that she will sleep upon
The ground beneath the trees, there is in store
The prospect of a night of rain or snow,
For cold and menacing the winds now blow.

64

She urges on her charger to a trot
And soon observes a shepherd with his flock,
Leaving the pastures for his simple cot.
Then, of her situation taking stock,
She asks the shepherd if he knows a spot
Where she may find some shelter; any nook
Will do, for no one is ill-lodged if warm
And dry he keeps, protected from a storm.

65

The shepherd said, 'The only place I know,
Unless I send you several miles from here,
Is Tristan's fortress, where not many go.
The doors are shut to every cavalier
Who does not first in single combat show
A winner's claim to a night's lodging there,
And, having won it with his lance, will fight
Against all comers to defend his right.

66

'For when a knight one foe has overcome
He is admitted by the castellan
(Always supposing there's a vacant room);
But he must arm himself and fight again
If any other claimants chance to come.
If not, he may in peace all night remain.
In this new combat, he who wins may stay,
The other sleeps outside till break of day.

67

'If two or three or more arrive at once,
They run but little risk of being turned out,
For if a single knight comes next by chance,
He has to fight them turn and turn about.
Just so, one cavalier in residence
To such a test of prowess may be put;
If two or three or more come after him,
The combat will be strenuous and grim.

68

'Likewise, if any lady should approach
The fortress-gate, escorted or alone,
She is obliged to yield her downy couch,
And sleep beneath the starry sky, if one
Arrives whose grace and loveliness are such
As to surpass and to eclipse her own.'
And, not content with words, the shepherd showed
The Maid with gestures where the fortress stood.

69

And Bradamante, eager to complete
The journey (of about six miles, or five,
The shepherd said) urges with hands and feet
Her willing horse, who does his best to strive
Against the muddy paths which spell defeat.
It is already dark when they arrive.
The fortress is shut fast, the gate is barred.
The Maid requests a lodging of the guard.

70

He told her all the rooms were occupied.
A group of knights and ladies had reserved
Them, who now waited in the hall inside
Around a fire for supper to be served.
'That meal is not for them,' the Maid replied.
'I know the custom; let it be observed.
Go in and tell them that a knight has come
To prove his right to occupy a room.'

71

The sentinel departs as he is told
And gives the message to the cavaliers.
Though they are valorous and brave and bold,
The challenge falls unwelcome on their ears.
The prospect of the dark and rain and cold
With present ease and comfort ill compares.
Reluctantly they arm and go outside
To meet the knight by whom they are defied.

72

They are those three whose valour is so great
By few in all the world they are surpassed.
They are those three whom we have seen of late
Beside the messenger whose troop went past.
They are those three who, hazarding their fate,
Resolve to win the golden shield; so fast
They spurred, they galloped on ahead of her
Who, now arriving, is their challenger.

73

Those who surpassed these cavaliers were few,
But Bradamante of those few was one.
Her night would not be spent outside, she knew,
In rain and darkness, hungry and alone.
The others who remained inside could view
The combat through the windows, for the moon,
Though veiled by clouds, yet shed a fitful light
Through drenching rain, illumining the fight.

74

As when a lover, burning with desire
To enter and enjoy that sweetest fruit
For which his senses long have been on fire,
Has heard the bolt which held the portal shut
Slide softly open and with love conspire,
So Bradamante, eager now to put
Her prowess to the test, rejoiced to hear
The drawbridge lowered as her foes drew near.

75

As soon as she has seen the three emerge
And cross the bridge, abreast or riding close,
She turns to take her distance and to urge
Her splendid destrier towards her foes.
The lance her cousin gave her on the verge
Of his departure is in rest; it throws
All enemies it touches, without fail;
Against it Mars himself could not prevail.

76

The king of Sweden, who rode forth ahead,
 Turned first and came towards her on the plain.
 The magic weapon smote him on the head,
 That lance which never lowered was in vain.
 The king of Gothland was the next who sped:
 His horse went wandering with dangled rein,
 Its rider far away and upside-down,
 Who, like the third, in mud seemed like to drown.

77

With these three blows the score the Maid has notched
 Is three heads down and six legs in the air.
 So, none of these encounters having botched,
 She gallops back towards the castle where
 She claims a bed; the castellan (who watched
 The combat) first obliges her to swear
 That if her claim is challenged she will fight,
 And then he grants her lodging for the night.

78

He pays her all due honour and respect,
 Having observed her prowess and her skill.
 So does the lady who, you recollect,
 Has come to do the queen of Iceland's will.
 The Maid approaches, formal and correct;
 The lady, rising with an affable,
 Serene and gracious smile, extends her hand
 And leads her to the fire where others stand.

79

And Bradamante, taking off her shield,
 Had next removed her helmet from her head.
 In doing so, the golden coif, which held
 Her tresses coiled and flat, she likewise shed.
 They fell about her shoulders and revealed
 Her unmistakably as a young maid,
 Who was as beautiful in countenance
 As she was skilled with horse and sword and lance.

80

As when the curtain falls to show a scene
 Illumined by a thousand brilliant lights,
 Where archways, statues, monuments are seen,
 Where paint and gilding add to the delights,
 Or when the sun emerges from between
 The clouds and with his radiant face invites
 Us to rejoice, so now before their eyes
 The helm, removed, discloses Paradise.

81

Her tresses which the holy hermit cut
 Have grown again; though shorter than they were,
 They can be coiled again to form a knot
 Behind her neck, and thus she binds her hair.
 The castellan now knows, beyond all doubt,
 That this is Bradamante, brave and fair,
 For he has seen her many times before,
 And now he pays her homage even more.

82

They sit beside the fire, and pleasant food
 Is offered to their ears by what they say,
 While for their bodies nourishment as good
 Will be provided in another way;
 And Bradamante, in this interlude,
 Asked why all travellers this fee must pay
 For lodging; was the custom new or old?
 This story in reply the host then told.

83

'Once in the days of good King Pharamont,
 Prince Clodione loved a fair young maid.
 Her beauty, grace, and manners elegant
 Put many other damsels in the shade.
 Such was his love for her that he was wont
 To keep his gaze on her as, it is said,
 Argus watched Io at the will of Jove,
 For jealousy in him was strong as love.

84

'On him the king this fortress had bestowed.
He kept the lady here and seldom went
Beyond the gates; and in this same abode
Ten of the bravest knights were resident.
One day by chance there passed along the road
The noble Tristan on adventure bent.
He had just saved a damsel in distress
From a fierce giant's undesired caress.

85

'Tristan arrived just as the setting sun
Had turned its shoulders to the Spanish shore.
He asked here for a bed (elsewhere not one
Could he have found, not for ten miles or more):
But entry was refused by Clodion.
Such were his love and jealousy, he swore
That to no stranger lodging would he give,
Long as his lovely lady here should live.

86

'When Tristan knew that prayers were in vain,
That Clodione never would agree,
'What I by gentle words could not obtain,
I hope to take from you by force," said he.
And so the prince he challenged and the ten
Who waited on him; and then instantly,
His sword unsheathed, his mighty lance in rest,
With a loud shout he called them to the test.

87

'These are the terms of combat he proposed:
If he unseated them and stayed upright,
The portals of the fortress would be closed
To *them* and *he* inside would spend the night.
Since such a challenge could not be refused,
Prince Clodione risks his life to fight.
He falls; and Tristan, turn and turn about,
Unseats the other ten and locks them out.

88

'And, entering the fortress, Tristan sees
The lady so beloved of Clodion.
Nature to women seldom lavish is
And yet of her she made a paragon.
Tristan exchanges a few courtesies.
Meanwhile outside the lover hammers on
The door, sparing no effort and no pain
To get his lovely lady back again.

89

'Tristan, although he does not highly prize
The lady (nor for any save Iseult
Whom he so greatly loves, could he have eyes -
The potion which he drank has this result),
To take revenge on Clodion replies:
'It would be a great wrong and a great fault
To turn such beauty out into the cold.
To do so is unchivalrous, I hold.

90

""But if the prince declines to sleep alone
Beneath the sky and asks for company,
I have a damsel here; her charms, I own,
Are less outstanding; but, despite that, she
Is young and fair; to pleasure she seems prone,
So let her do his will; it seems to me
That it is only right and only just
The fairest should reward the most robust."

91

'These haughty words of Tristan do not please
The prince, who snorts with rage, and all night through,
As if for those who slept inside at ease
He were on guard, he paces to and fro;
And much more than the cold and rain which freeze
His bones, his lady's absence does he rue.
Tristan, who had compassion on his grief,
Next morning gave her back, to his relief.

92

'He grieved no more, for Tristan told him plain
The lady was restored to him intact;
And though for his ill manners and disdain
The prince deserved worse punishment in fact,
The night which he had passed in wind and rain
Tristan accepted, and dissolved the pact.
But he would not accept as an excuse
That Love thus drove the prince to such abuse.

93

'For Love refines a rough and churlish heart;
The opposite result should be unknown.
When Tristan and his company depart,
It is not long before Prince Clodion
For a new domicile prepares to start;
But first the fortress he entrusts to one
Whom he has long held dear, who will impose
The rule which Tristan made; and then he goes.

94

'And thus the cavalier of greatest might,
The lady who is seen to be most fair,
Shall turn the others out into the night,
To sleep upon the grass or anywhere
They can; and, as you saw, this custom, right
Until today, is honoured by us here.'
The castellan thus finishes his tale;
Meanwhile the steward has prepared the meal.

95

It is laid ready in the dining-hall.
No finer room in all the world was seen.
With lighted torches, pages come to call
The ladies, who are ushered to the scene.
When Bradamante enters, every wall
Attracts her gaze; the other damsel in
Astonishment likewise admires the sight
Of paintings which extend from left to right.

96

In ecstasy before such loveliness,
Each guest the noble paintings contemplates,
Though need for food they have, as you may guess,
After a tiring day; the steward waits
Impatiently: it causes him distress
To see the supper cooling on the plates.
The cook calls out, 'First fill your stomachs, pray;
Then feast your eyes on what the walls display.'

97

When they were seated, ready to commence,
The castellan remembered there were two
Fair ladies present; this was an offence.
The fairer one must stay, the other go
And brave the fury of the elements.
And there was nothing else which they could do,
For Bradamante and the messenger
That night had not arrived together there.

98

He calls two servitors and several maids,
Whose judgement and discernment he can trust.
They scrutinize the ladies from their heads
Down to their toes, and finally they must
Admit that Bradamante's beauty leads,
And everyone agrees this view is just.
In loveliness she is victorious
As she in combat proved more valorous.

99

The host the other lady then addressed
(Who had with apprehension waited for
The verdict): 'I regret, since in this test
You are the loser, you must yield before
Your rival; she, not you, must be our guest,
And I, alas! must show you to the door,
For she, though unadorned, surpasses you,
And this the law obliges me to do.'

100

As suddenly an inky cloud is spied
Which from a marshy vale on high ascends,
That pure and shining countenance to hide
Which radiance to all creation lends,
So, when she hears the sentence which outside
Will banish her, her head the lady bends,
And all her face is clouded with despair
Which only now so joyful was and fair.

101

Her countenance has altered and turned pale,
This verdict is so terrible to hear.
But Bradamante's wisdom does not fail;
She reassures the lady in her fear.
She says, 'No judgement rightly can prevail
Unless the arguments well-weighed appear,
And the accused must also testify,
To affirm the evidence, or to deny.

102

'Now as the counsel for defence, I say:
Whether or not I am more fair than she,
Not as a woman I came here today,
Nor do I want a woman's victory.
Unless I strip quite naked, who can say
If what she is I can be shown to be?
What is not proved should not be used in court,
And even less, if someone it may hurt.

103

'Consider all the knights who have long hair:
Not all of them are women, you'll allow.
I won my lodging as a cavalier.
That fact was obvious to all. Why now
The name of woman do you make me bear,
If masculine my every deed is? How
Can you be said to keep the law, if men
With women fight? What is your verdict then?

104

'Let us suppose that, as it seems to you,
I am a woman (which I don't concede)
And that my beauty is unequal to
This lady's beauty: would you have agreed
To take away from me what is my due?
It would be scarcely justice if you did:
To take away from me for lesser charms
What I've already won by force of arms.

105

'Even supposing such your custom was
And she must leave whose beauty is surpassed,
I should remain in any case, because,
Whatever the result, I should stand fast.
The test between us two defies your laws;
The die against her is already cast,
For if she wins in beauty, I contend
In arms, and must defeat her in the end.

106

'There must be perfect parity between
Competitors; if not, it should be clear
The judgement is invalid; it is seen
That as of right or as a gift to her
A lodging must be granted, and herein
She must remain; if any challenger
His verdict against mine would like to test,
I am prepared to show that mine is best.'

107

So deeply was Count Aymon's daughter stirred
By the sad prospect of the lady's plight,
And so regretted all that had occurred
To put her at the mercy of the night,
Without a roof, the castellan who heard
Her arguments now judged that she was right.
Her final words convinced him above all:
Agreement with them seemed most logical.

108

As when beneath the burning summer sun
 A need of moisture in the grass is plain,
 And when a flower in which almost none
 Of its life-giving fluids now remain
 Delights to feel in all its vessels run
 The sweet refreshment of the friendly rain,
 So the queen's messenger became once more
 As joyful and as lovely as before.

109

The supper which before them had been spread,
 Which had remained in all this time untasted,
 They now enjoyed; no claimants for a bed,
 No passing cavaliers their peace molested.
 By all, the food was relished, save the Maid.
 On her alone such *haute cuisine* was wasted:
 Her fears, her doubts, her jealousy, which quite
 Unfounded were, had spoiled her appetite.

110

She leaves the table soon to feast her eyes
 Upon the beauty of the painted walls.
 The queen of Iceland's lady does likewise.
 The castellan at once a servant calls
 Who, lighting countless candles of great size,
 Sheds splendour everywhere a shadow falls,
 Till the whole chamber is as bright as day.
 And what next happened in my next I'll say.

CANTO XXXIII

I

Such ancient painters as Parrhasius,
 Zeuxis, Timàgoras, Protògenes,
 Apollodorus and Polygnotus,
 Timanthes, Alexander's Àpelles,
 Whose names for ever will be known to us
 (In spite of Clotho and her cruelties)
 As long as men shall write and men shall read
 What artists' hands in former ages did,

2

And those of recent times, or living still,
 Leonardo and Mantegna and the two
 Named Dossi, Gian Bellino, he whose skill
 In paint and marble may be likened to
 The Angel Michael's, Bastian, Raphael,
 And Titian to whose mastery is due
 Such glory that Urbino shares no more,
 And Venice shines no brighter, than Cadore;

3

And many others, in whose works is seen
 The selfsame genius of the past, have all
 Depicted with their brushes what has been,
 Some upon board and some upon a wall;
 But you have never known or heard, not in
 The art of ancient times, nor those we call
 The new, of artists who have painted things
 To come - such works as now my poem sings.

4

But of this talent let no artist boast,
 Whether he be of olden times or new;
 To sorcery, which sets the infernal host
 A-tremble, all such works of art are due.
 That painted dining-hall which I discussed
 The book of Merlin (whether sacred to
 Avernus or Nursia) brought to sight
 By demons' labour in a single night.

5

The magic art by which our ancestors
 Did many wondrous things is dead today.
 But now the guests have waited many hours
 To see the painted room, so let me say
 Again how rapidly the light devours
 The dark when servants hasten to obey
 Their lord's command and flaming torches bring,
 And the room's splendours into vision spring.

6

The castellan addressed the company:
 'I want you all to understand', he said,
 'That of the wars which painted here you see
 Few have been fought, so do not be misled.
 This is not only art but prophecy.
 What victories, what failures, lie ahead
 For us in Italy, these walls make plain
 And will illumine many a campaign.

7

'The battles which the Franks predestined are
 To wage beyond the Alps, for good or ill,
 The prophet Merlin with spectacular
 Effect depicted, from his time until
 A thousand years from thence; this theme of war
 The sorcerer set forth with all his skill.
 The British king had sent him on this task:
 "What purpose did he have?" I hear you ask.

8

'King Pharamond had been the first to lead
 An army of the Franks across the Rhine
 To Gaul, and there as sovereign he stayed.
 To seize proud Italy was his design,
 Seeing the Empire day by day decline;
 So with King Arthur Pharamond had made
 A pact, to join the British strength with his
 (For these two monarchs were contemporaries).

9

'No act of war King Arthur entered on
 Without consulting Merlin (him I mean
 Who was conceived and born a demon's son,
 By whom events to come were clearly seen);
 And from him Arthur learned, and he made known
 To Pharamond, the danger which had been
 Foretold if he invaded Italy,
 The land girt by the Alps and by the sea.

10

'Merlin revealed that almost all the kings
 Who in the future were to govern France
 Would meet destruction in their plunderings
 By steel, by famine and by pestilence.
 Joys will be brief, and long their sufferings,
 And losses rather than inheritance
 They'll find in Italy, for in that plot
 God wills the fleur-de-lis shall ne'er take root.

11

'King Pharamond believed the sorcerer
 Who saw the future clearly as the past,
 And planned instead to send his troops elsewhere;
 And Merlin, it is said, at his request,
 Depicted all the scenes which you see here,
 And by a magic spell made manifest
 The future deeds of Frankish kings, as though
 They had already happened long ago.

12

'Thus all successive kings might understand
That victory and honour would reward
Whoe'er stood forth as champion of that land
Against the onslaughts of a savage horde.
Contrariwise, if any should descend
To subjugate her or become her lord,
Him from his own undoing none should save:
Beyond the Alps he'd dig his certain grave.'

13

With this preamble, the kind castellan
Led the two ladies to the painted wall
And showed them where the histories began.
To Sigibert he pointed first of all:
'From the Mons Iovis to the Lombard plain
See him descend, lured by imperial
Mauricius and his promises of gold;
Here his defeat by Authari behold.

14

'See Clovis who a hundred thousand leads,
And more, across the Alps; and see the duke
Of Benevento who by guile succeeds,
Although outnumbered; see, he has forsook
The camp and lies in ambush, which misleads
The Franks, who like a fish upon a hook
Are caught: they rush with glee upon the casks
Of Lombard wine – no better the duke asks.

15

'And see how large a host King Childebert
Has brought to Italy, yet he, no more
Than Clovis, can supremacy assert,
Nor claim that he has waged successful war.
In Lombardy he meets his just desert:
A blazing sword which Heaven has in store
For him, descends; in droves his troops succumb
To dysentery; not one in ten gets home.'

16

He points to Pepin and to Charlemagne,
Showing how each to Italy descends,
How each of them succeeds in his campaign,
For neither harm to that fair land intends;
But one against Aistulf the sovereign
Pope Stephen aids; the other first defends
Pope Adrian against the Lombard might,
And next to Leo he restores his right.

17

Pepin the Younger he moves on to show,
Who with his army seems to cover all
The region from the outlet of the Po
As far as Pellestrina's littoral;
Who builds a pontoon bridge at Malmocco;
Whose troops attack Rialto, but to fall
Into the depths of the lagoon and drown
When wind and water wash the structure down.

18

'Look, here is Ludwig, King of Burgundy,
And here is one who takes him prisoner,
And here he makes him promise solemnly
That he will never more return; but here
The monarch breaks his promise, as you see,
And falls into the trap his foes prepare.
They rob him of his eyes, and like a mole
He is borne home to France to count the toll.

19

'See Hugh of Arles who from the Lombard plains
Has put two Berengarii to flight:
One helped by Huns, one by Bavarians,
Each fails in turn to reassert his right.
But Hugh at last is forced to yield his gains
And soon he dies; so does his offspring, quite
Soon after him (the cause was dubious).
The realm then passed to Berengarius.

20

'See there another Charles, the Angevin,
Who sets the land of Italy ablaze
To aid the Pope; Manfred and Conradin
In two relentless battles he now slays,
And here his cruel army may be seen
Oppressing the new realm in countless ways.
Now see it scattered through the citadel,
Killed at the signal of a vesper bell.'

21

And next he shows, after an interval
Of many lustres, let alone of years,
A captain who descends the Alps from Gaul
With a vast host of foot and cavaliers
Against the great Visconti, which the wall
Of Alessandria to gird appears.
But Galeazzo has things well in hand:
Defence within, ambush without, are planned.

22

And where the cunning net with skill is spread,
By the imprudent Count of Armagnac
The unsuspecting men of France are led.
Visconti's army strikes them from the back.
The countryside is littered with the dead;
Of captives too it seems there is no lack.
With blood no less than water, they see flow
The river Tanar, reddening the Po.

23

The castellan, proceeding as before,
Names others to the ladies one by one:
'La Marca and three Angevins are four
Who, each in turn unleashing havoc on
The south, in waves through all its regions pour.
But, spite of aid from Franks and Latians, none
Remains; however many times they come,
Alfonso or Ferrante sends them home.

24

'See Charles the Eighth who with the flower of France
Descends the Alps and Liri's flood has crossed.
No sword is drawn and lowered is no lance.
The realm of Naples none the less is lost,
Save for that rock which to Typhoeus grants
No respite, there spread-eagled to his cost.
Inigo Vasto by his brave defence
The Frenchman's further progress here prevents.'

25

And here the castellan, who showed the Maid
How to interpret future history,
Pointed to Ischia; and then he said,
'There are so many paintings yet to see,
But first let me relate what as a lad
My grandfather was wont to tell to me,
What he had often heard his father say,
Repeating what *he* heard in his young day,

26

'When in his turn his father would relate
What he had heard his grandsire recollect
What he had heard his father's father state,
Back to the one who heard the tale direct
From him who undertook to decorate
These walls without a brush, with the effect
Of brilliant colours which you here behold:
This is the story I will now unfold.

27

'It was foreseen that from this cavalier
Who bravely holds the threatened citadel,
And scorns the raging fury far and near,
Another would arise invincible
(And Merlin told the very month and year)
Who in his deeds all others would excel,
Who would surpass in might and chivalry
All other heroes known to history.

28

'Nereus was less beautiful, less strong
 Achilles was, Ulysses was less bold,
 Less fleet was Ladas, Nestor who among
 The wisest men was held, less wise I hold;
 Less liberal was Caesar, famed in song,
 To pleas for mercy deaf, to justice cold:
 Beside him who in Ischia is born,
 Such heroes seem of all their virtues shorn.

29

'If ancient Crete was jubilant because
 The grandson of Uranus was born there,
 As Thebes for Hercules and Bacchus was,
 If Delos boasted of the heavenly pair,
 The isle of Ischia will have no cause
 Not to exult and triumph in her share
 Of glory when the marquess in that place
 Is born, endowed with all celestial grace.

30

'Merlin the prophet many times foretold
 That Providence would long delay his birth
 Until the Empire toppled; by his bold
 Exploits (of which you'll see there is no dearth)
 He'll render her illustrious as of old;
 But let me not anticipate his worth.'
 And with these words, the kindly castellan
 Moved on along the painted walls again.

31

'His folly Ludovico here repents',
 He said, 'in bringing Charles to Italy.
 His plan was not to drive his rival hence,
 But harass him; stirred now to enmity,
 He joins with Venice and to Charles presents
 These serried ranks of hostile soldiery.
 The king with resolution puts his lance
 In rest and opens up a path to France.

32

'But all his troops who in the south remain
 Will undergo a very different fate.
 Ferrante, aided by the Mantuan,
 Returns so strong that not a single pate
 Is left unbroken: all the French are slain
 In a few months; and vengeance comes too late
 When he who with a Moor a pact has made
 By that same traitor is himself betrayed.'

33

And that unhappy marquess he now shows,
 Alfonso of Pescara, and he says,
 'More brightly than the fiery garnet glows
 His glory; countless are the foes he slays.
 But see the traitor's net around him close,
 Spread by an evil Ethiop, who plays
 A double game; see now an arrow strike
 His throat; the world will never know his like.

34

'With an Italian escort, Louis is
 The next to cross the Alps; the mulberry
 He first uproots, then plants the fleur-de-lis
 In rich Visconti soil of Lombardy.
 Where Charles's army went he now sends his.
 By means of pontoon bridges rapidly
 They cross the Garigliano, but soon all
 His troops are slain or in the river fall.

35

'See in Apulia no fewer dead
 Where the French troops are likewise put to rout.
 Consalvo is that general', he said,
 'Who tricks them twice; then Fortune turned about.
 She frowned on Louis here, but on him shed
 Her smile in the rich northern lowlands, cut
 Between the Alps and Apennines, right to
 The Adriatic, by the river Po.'

36

Then he rebukes himself, remembering
 Another episode which he omitted;
 And, going back, he shows one bartering
 A castle which his lord to him committed.
 And next the Swiss falsely imprisoning
 A master whom to serve it more befitted.
 These two betrayals give the king of France
 The victory, who couches not one lance.

37

And Caesar Borgia he next indicates,
 By Louis raised on high in Italy,
 By whom all barons in the Roman States
 And every subject lord deposed will be.
 Then in Bologna the same king enstates
 (Removing first the Saw from sovereignty)
 The papal Acorns; Genoa rebels,
 And Louis straight away the tumult quells.

38

'Behold how Ghiaradadda's countryside
 Is littered with the many thousands slain.
 All city-gates to Louis open wide.
 Venice her freedom scarcely can maintain.
 See how beyond Romagna passage is denied
 To Julius who seeks, but seeks in vain,
 To rob Ferrara's duke of Modena;
 Here Acorns from Bologna banished are.

39

'For Louis now restores the rightful lords:
 The Bentivoglio family returns.
 And next his army marches on towards
 The walls of Brescia, which it sacks and burns,
 Then to Bologna instant help affords
 Against the Pope, and double glory earns.
 Here, as you see, both armies meet again
 Beside Ravenna, upon Classe's plain.

40

'Here are the French and there the troops of Spain,
 The battle now is merciless and dire.
 On both sides bodies fall and scarlet stain
 The soil; in every ditch the mud and mire
 Are mingled with the life-blood of the slain.
 Mars stands uncertain, but Alfonso's fire
 At last secures the victory for France;
 Of no avail to Spain are sword and lance.

41

'Ravenna will be sacked, as you can see.
 Biting his lips with frenzied grief, the Pope
 Summons the German hordes to Italy,
 Who pour in raging torrents down the slope.
 They chase the Frenchmen forth relentlessly,
 Granting no quarter, leaving them no hope;
 And of the Mulberry they plant a shoot
 Where the fair Fleur-de-lis they first uproot.

42

'The French return and are destroyed again
 By the disloyal Swiss, employed to aid,
 To his great risk, young Maximilian,
 Whose father they had captured and betrayed.
 But see how, under a new sovereign,
 The army is reformed and plans are made
 That Frenchmen may obliterate the shame
 Inflicted at Novara on their name.

43

'Observe with what high hopes they now set out.
 Observe the king of France who rides ahead,
 Who by his prowess puts the Swiss to rout.
 Many are slain, the others all are fled.
 Their motto is usurped, there is no doubt.
 No longer on their banners will be read:
 "Tamers of Princes", "Of the Church of Rome
 Defenders"; vain have all their boasts become.

44

'See how despite the League he takes Milan
And with young Sforza reaches an accord;
And see how Bourbon Charles does all he can
To fend the Germans off with lance and sword.
The monarch, busy elsewhere with a plan
To stem the Emperor's advance, the abhorred
Excesses of his regents cannot check,
And so Milan from him the allies take.

45

'Behold the young Francesco Sforza who
In prowess as in name his ancestor
Resembles; to his heritage anew
He comes, assisted by the Church; once more
The French return, but are unable to
Proceed unchallenged as they did before.
The duke of Mantua, who blocks the way,
On the Ticino glory wins that day.

46

'See Federigo, on whose youthful cheeks
No down has blossomed yet: Mantua's duke.
Eternal glory with his lance he seeks
And with his diligence and cunning. Look!
He saves Pavia from the French and checks
The Lion's plan. Two marquesses, who brook
No opposition, both will prove to be
Our terror and the boast of Italy,

47

'Both of one blood, both born in the same nest.
Alfonso of Pescara's son is he
(You saw his sire shot in the throat, who least
Expected such an act of treachery).
The French from Italy will oft be chased
By his advice; the other whom you see,
Benign and glad of countenance, is named
Alfonso, for his rule of Vasto famed.

48

'He is that gallant knight of whom I said,
When Ischia I pointed out to you,
That Merlin many centuries ahead
Had prophesied the deeds that he would do,
Foretelling that his birth, long heralded,
Should be deferred until the time was due
When stricken Italy his help would need,
And from their wounds both Church and Empire bleed.

49

'With his Pescara cousin (in their rear,
Prosper Colonna) how he makes the Swiss
Pay dearly for Bicocca! And more dear
The French will pay, as you may tell from this.
Look how the French, led by their king, prepare
To make their losses good; one army is
Descending to the fertile Lombard plain;
The other, Naples tries to take again.

50

'But Fortune, who does with us what she will,
As the wind whirls the particles of sand,
Tossing them in a cloud on high until
It dies away and drops them on the land
From which it lifted them, her utmost skill
Now uses to persuade the king a band,
One hundred thousand strong, Pavia rings.
Heedless, he gives his mind to other things.

51

'But, owing to the greed of ministers,
And to the king's indulgent trust in them,
He has but few, not many, followers;
And when, at night, "To arms!" the trumpets scream,
The king, to his surprise, meets a reverse:
The Spaniards cunningly leap out at him.
By the Avalos cousins they are led
And Heaven or Hell itself they would invade.

52

‘See how the finest noblemen of France
Lie dead, their bodies scattered on the ground.
See how the Spanish troops with sword and lance
The gallant monarch on all sides surround.
See how his horse in full accoutrements
Has fallen, but the king is not yet downed.
He does not cry, “Enough!”, he does not yield:
Alone, unaided, he confronts the field.

53

‘The valiant king defends himself on foot,
Drenched by the blood of foes as if by rain.
Numbers at last prevail; here, you will note,
The king is captured, here he is in Spain.
The marquess of Pescara shares the fruit
Of victory with Vasto’s lord: the twain
Are never seen apart, and both receive
The glory for the deeds which both achieve.

54

‘This army now destroyed, the other one,
En route for Naples, which it hoped to take,
Is like a lamp from which the oil is gone,
Or like a taper, flickering and weak,
For lack of wax. The king returns alone,
Leaving his sons in prison; see him make
New war on Italy, while on his soil
Invading armies enter and despoil.

55

‘Here sacrilegious murderers you see,
And Rome in all her regions desolate.
With rapine, rape and arson equally
The sacred and profane they violate.
The army of the League, which ought to be
The Pope’s defender, leaves him to his fate;
Hearing the Roman people shriek and wail
And witnessing their sorrows, it turns tail.

56

‘The king with reinforcements sends Lautrec,
Not to wage war on Lombardy again,
But from those impious, thieving hands to take
The Church’s head and to its limbs re-join.
Too long is the delay which he will make.
Ere he arrives the Pontiff will regain
His freedom; so to Naples he next turns
His hostile forces, and the city sacks and burns.

57

‘Behold the imperial fleet set sail to aid
The stricken city of Parthénope.
Behold them now by Doria waylaid,
Who burns their ships and drowns them in the sea.
Behold how fickle Fortune has betrayed
The French, so favoured by her recently:
To fever they succumb, not to the lance.
Of many thousands, few return to France.’

58

Such were the tales depicted in the hall
In many different colours, bright and fair.
Long it would take me to describe them all.
The meaning of the paintings now is clear.
Repeatedly the ladies scan them all
And fascinated at the future stare.
Repeatedly they read the words of gold
Which name the heroes and their deeds unfold.

59

The two fair ladies mingled with the rest,
Discoursing on the paintings for a while.
The castellan then led them to their rest
(His visitors were honoured in this style),
But Bradamante, troubled and distressed,
The long, slow hours unable to beguile,
Tossing and turning on her bed all night,
Now on her left lies wakeful, now her right.

60

Soon after dawn she shuts her eyes at last
 And sees her dear Ruggiero in a dream,
 Who says to her, 'Why are you so downcast?
 What you believe is false. Sooner a stream
 Would flow uphill than I could ever wrest
 My thoughts from you; my very eyes I'd deem
 Less dear, my very heart I would abhor,
 If than myself I did not love you more.'

61

And then he seems to add, 'I come today
 To be baptized and to fulfil my vow.
 Wounds, other than of love, caused my delay
 And kept me lying helpless until now.'
 Ruggiero and the dream then melt away.
 No further words from him the Fates allow.
 Fair Bradamante wakes, and weeps anew,
 Convinced that the sweet vision is untrue.

62

And with herself communing in this wise,
 'The pleasurable dream is false, alas!
 My waking torment is the truth,' she cries;
 'Too soon the lovely vision vanished has,
 And harsh reality now greets my eyes.
 Ah! Why do I not hear and see him as
 Just now I heard him clearly in my thought
 And saw him plainly while my eyes were shut?

63

'Sweet sleep has brought me promises of peace,
 But bitter waking brings me back to war.
 Sweet sleep, I know, but an illusion is,
 But bitter waking does not, cannot, err.
 If truth brings sorrow and illusions please,
 Then of the truth, ah! leave me unaware.
 If sleep brings happiness and waking pain,
 Then may I sleep and never wake again!

64

'Happy the creatures that for half the year
 Sleep undisturbed and waken not at all!
 And though with death such slumber we compare,
 My hours of waking, life I will not call,
 For I alone a strange misfortune bear:
 Waking I die, but when to sleep I fall
 I live; and if such sleep is a demise,
 Ah, Death, I pray, make haste to close my eyes!'

65

Far in the East, the early morning sun
 Had crimsoned the horizon with its ray.
 The clouds of the preceding night were gone
 And fair the promise seemed of the new day.
 The Maid arose and put her armour on,
 Desiring to be soon upon her way,
 But first she sought the kindly castellan
 And thanked him for his courtesy again.

66

She found the queen of Iceland's messenger
 Had left the castle with her retinue.
 Outside, three warriors awaited her,
 Whom Bradamante vanquished, owing to
 The golden lance; each from his destrier
 Had been unseated, and the whole night through
 Exposure to the elements endured,
 In howling winds and in the rain which poured.

67

They and their steeds, to add to their mishaps,
 Were left with empty bellies all that night
 To champ and stamp; and, worst of all, perhaps
 (No, beyond any doubt, this crowned their plight),
 Their queen would surely hear of their collapse.
 The messenger the tidings would recite,
 How each had failed, laid low by the first lance
 Which they had met to run against in France.

68

And they were ready now to do or die;
 Their one desire was to avenge their shame.
 That the report to be delivered by
 The messenger (Ullania is her name)
 Might be more favourable, they would try
 Their strength once more. When Bradamante came
 Across the drawbridge, straight away they called
 A challenge to her, resolute and bold.

69

They had no inkling she was not a man,
 For not one gesture gave the truth away.
 At first she scorned their challenge and began
 To gallop off, unwilling to delay;
 But after her insistently they ran.
 For honour's sake she had to turn and stay.
 Couching her lance, three monarchs with three blows
 She floored, and brought the conflict to a close.

70

For, riding off, she did not turn again,
 But from their sight she disappeared at speed.
 The kings, who came so far in hope to gain
 The golden shield by some heroic deed,
 Rose to their feet in silence; it was plain,
 Despite their resolution to succeed,
 All three of them had failed. In their disgrace
 They dared not look Ullania in the face.

71

Too many times with her along the road
 They'd boasted of their prowess and had claimed
 No paladin or knight who ever rode
 To arms, of the most brave or skilled or famed,
 Could stand against them; and such pride they showed,
 Ullania, to make them more ashamed,
 Told them, in punishment for arrogance,
 They were unseated by a woman's lance.

72

'So, if a female knight can thus defeat
 All three of you, what do you think', she says,
 'Will be the outcome if by chance you meet
 Orlando or Rinaldo, whom men praise,
 And not without good cause, for many a feat?
 I put it to you, if a woman lays
 You flat, will you fare better against them?
 I do not think so, nor do you, I deem.

73

'Let this suffice, you need no further proof:
 You understand now what your valour is.
 If one of you has not yet had enough
 And wants to make another test of his,
 He'll to the warp of shame add but the woof
 Of mortifying wounds and injuries,
 Unless he's eager to be vanquished by
 Such warriors and at their hand to die.'

74

And when the messenger had proved to each
 That by a woman they had been unseated;
 That their bright fame was blacker now than pitch;
 That what she said could well have been repeated
 By ten more witnesses at least, the breach
 Thus opened in their self-esteem defeated
 Them anew; on their breasts they all but turned
 Their weapons, with such grief and rage they burned.

75

By wrath and fury stung, each king in haste
 Undoes his armour, tearing off his coat
 Of mail, his sword unclasps from round his waist
 And throws it deep into the castle moat.
 That by a woman they have been outfaced,
 That twice, so soundly, each of them she smote,
 Is such a lapse from valour, they all swear
 They will not put on armour for a year.

76

And everywhere on foot they meant to go,
 Whether the path be smooth or rough or steep.
 And when a year had passed, then even so
 Their vow they would continue yet to keep
 Until a horse and armour from a foe
 They won; thus of their fall all three would reap
 The consequence by this self-punishment:
 On horse the others rode, on foot they went.

77

Fair Bradamante, riding onward, came
 That evening to a castle, on the way
 To Paris. Here she heard her brother's name
 And Charlemagne's, and learned about the fray
 Which to King Agramante had brought shame;
 And here good victuals on the tables lay,
 Here were good beds: to her of little use,
 Who little eats and little can repose.

78

But I must not delay so long with her
 That I forget to tell you what took place
 When those two knights I mentioned earlier
 Prepared to fight each other face to face.
 Each by the fount had tied his destrier.
 The winner of the battle would possess
 Orlando's sword and on Baiardo ride:
 The time had come these matters to decide.

79

And so, unheralded, untrumpeted,
 Hearing no formal signal to commence,
 Unwatched, unaided and unseconded,
 With none to warn, or shout encouragements,
 They move towards each other, as agreed,
 As agile in attack as in defence;
 And the repeated crash of heavy blows
 Reverberates around as anger grows.

80

Not two such swords I know, however tested,
 However solid, firm and hard they are,
 That of these blades three strokes could have resisted,
 For they beat all comparison, by far.
 No others of such temper e'er existed,
 No others proved so trustworthy in war,
 For they a thousand times and more might clash
 Together blow on blow, and never smash.

81

This way and that, Rinaldo, with great skill,
 First on the one and then the other foot,
 Evaded Durindana, knowing well
 That through unyielding iron she could cut.
 Gradasso flashed the celebrated steel
 And wielded her with all his vigour, but
 Either his strokes were wasted on the air
 Or smote Rinaldo where they harmless were.

82

Rinaldo plies his sword with greater care
 And many times he numbs the pagan's arm.
 Now in his side he thrusts the blade, now where
 The corslet joins the helmet, but no harm
 Can he inflict, nor of his mail-coat tear
 A single mesh, for it was woven by a charm.
 His breastplate had been forged by magic too
 And was impenetrable through and through.

83

They took no rest, so fixed was their intent,
 Although a great part of the day was gone.
 Both were incensed and neither would relent
 But, gazing straight ahead, they battled on,
 When suddenly another clamour rent
 The air; their combat they suspend, with one
 Accord they turn to find the reason why,
 And see Baiardo menaced from on high.

84

They saw a monster harass and attack
The steed; it was a bird of giant size,
And yet some bird-like features seemed to lack.
Its beak was three yards long, but otherwise
Its head was like a bat's; its plumes were black
As ink, its talons merciless, its eyes,
Darting their cruel glances, were as red
As flame, its wings as wide as sails full-spread.

85

Perhaps the monster truly was a bird,
Yet I know none in any century
Like this, nor any land, nor have I heard
Of one, except in Turpin's history,
Wherein to such a creature he referred.
I am inclined to think that it may be
A devil Malagigi conjured up
From Hell to bring the combat to a stop.

86

Rinaldo thought so too, and angry words
Will be exchanged by the indignant knight
With Malagigi not long afterwards;
But he does not confess, and by the Light
Which lights the sun he swears that neither birds
Nor demons he despatched to stop the fight.
The monster, whether bird or bat it was,
Swooped on the steed and seized him with its claws.

87

Baiardo, who is strong, soon snaps the rein.
Enraged, he plunges, rears and bites and kicks.
The monster rises in the air again
And, downwards swooping, with its talons pricks
The destrier and maddens him with pain.
No reason to allow the bird to vex
Him further the outraged Baiardo sees,
Who from the scene of battle quickly flees.

88

So to the near-by wood Baiardo fled,
Seeking the thickest boughs to hide among.
The feathered beast pursued him overhead,
And watched which path its quarry went along;
But soon that winged monster was outsped.
The wonder-horse, alert and swift and strong,
Had found a cave to hide in, and away
The creature flew, in search of other prey.

89

Rinaldo and Gradasso, who thus see
One bone of their contention take its leave,
To cease their combat readily agree
Until the monster's quarry they retrieve,
Which gallops through the darkling wood; and he
(Their solemn promise each to each they give)
Who first succeeds in capturing the mount
Shall bring him back and tie him by the fount.

90

So they depart and, following the clue
Of grasses freshly trampled to the ground,
The hoof-marks of Baiardo they pursue,
Who will not easily by now be found.
Gradasso mounts his Spanish mare and through
The forest gallops, leaving with one bound
The paladin behind, disconsolate
And deeply discontented with his fate.

91

He quickly lost the hoof-prints of his horse.
By river-banks, by boulders and by trees,
Baiardo chose so strange and wild a course,
The thorniest thickets and the roughest scree,
To escape the monster plummeting with force
Upon his back, inflicting agonies.
So, when he saw his efforts were in vain,
Rinaldo waited by the fount again,

92

To see if King Gradasso brought him there,
As they agreed; when this had borne no fruit,
Rinaldo left the fountain, in despair,
And sadly he went back to camp on foot.
Now let us leave him and return to where
Gradasso gallops off in hot pursuit.
His journey ends in quite another way
When near at hand he hears Baiardo neigh.

93

He found him hiding in a hollow cave
Where he had taken refuge in his fright.
He was so terrified, he would not brave
The open, so Gradasso caught him quite
Without resistance; though he knows they have
Agreed to bring him back, now, uncontrite,
Gradasso has resolved to overlook
His promise, and within himself thus spoke:

94

'Let those who will, obtain this steed by force,
But I prefer in peace to make my claim.
From the Far East I travelled a long course,
To call Baiardo mine being my sole aim;
And now that finally I have the horse,
I will not give him up; and as I came
To France, so let Rinaldo travel east,
If he desires so much to have the beast.

95

'No less secure will Sericana be
For him, if he should venture in those parts,
Than France has twice already proved for me.'
Choosing a level pathway, he departs.
To Arles he comes and, making for the sea,
He finds the fleet, and on a galley starts.
For home, with sword and charger making off;
But on this matter I have said enough.

96

I want to find the English knight once more,
Who rode the hippogriff just like a steed.
So fast above the clouds he made him soar,
Eagles and falcons travel at less speed.
Over all France the paladin it bore,
From sea to sea, from west to east it sped,
Then turned towards the mighty mountain-chain
Which separates the land of France from Spain.

97

Over Navarre and thence to Aragon
They pass, causing amazement down below.
Biscay is on his right and Tarragon
Is on his left; Castile is next in view,
Galicia, Portugal he gazes on,
Then changes course to Còrdova and to
Seville; and not one city in all Spain
Does he omit, on coast or hill or plain.

98

Astolfo hovers next above Cadiz
And the two signs set up in early days
By the indomitable Hercules.
The coast of Africa now meets his gaze;
The Balearic Islands too he sees,
Which for their rich fertility men praise.
Then, changing course again, towards Tangier
He flies, and soon Arzilla he draws near.

99

Fez in Morocco he observes, Oran,
Algiers, Bougie and Bone, proud cities all,
Centres of commerce and far richer than
The other cities on that littoral.
Then on he spurs to the Tunisian
Biserta and the thriving capital,
Gabes and Djerba and, next, Tripoli,
Benghazi and the shores of the Red Sea.

100

Thus every town and region he surveyed
Between the sea and Atlas' tree-clad spine.
To the Carena mountains then he bade
Farewell, flying directly in a line
To Cyrenaica, thence to Baiad
In Nubia, not far from the confine.
The tomb of Battus now behind him lay
And Ammon's temple, derelict today.

101

Another Tremesin Astolfo passed
(As in Algeria, here too the style
Of worship is Mahommedan); then fast
To Ethiopia, across the Nile
He flew, from Dobada until at last
He came to Coalle after many a mile.
Here these are Christians, while those pagans are,
And at their confines is unending war.

102

The Emperor Senapo (Prester John)
Rules Ethiopia, and in his hand
He wields no sceptre but the Cross alone.
The Red Sea is the border of his land,
Where cities teem and golden bullion
Abounds; if I mistake not, here they brand
The neophyte upon his brow, as well
As using water – or so travellers tell.

103

Senapo's faith, like ours in some respects,
Exempted him from banishment to Hell.
Astolfo has dismounted and inspects
The castle where the king, he thinks, must dwell.
Its costly style more wealth than strength reflects.
The drawbridge and portcullis chains, as well
As hinges on the doors, and bolts which hold
Them shut, are not of iron but of gold.

104

Though gold is here abundant, it is true,
The use of it is held in high esteem.
Columns of crystal lend enchantment to
The spacious loggias; brilliant colours gleam –
Yellow and red and green and white and blue –
In patterned friezes which adorn the rim
Of royal monuments and palaces –
Emeralds, sapphires, rubies, topazes.

105

Inlaid on walls, on roof-tops and on floors,
Are rarest pearls and other precious gems.
Here balsam is produced, in richer stores
Than any portion of Jerusalem's.
Amber from here arrives at many shores,
And here the hunter by his stratagems
Deprives the musk-deer of his sweet perfume:
From here so many things of value come.

106

And the Egyptian Sultan, it is said,
Pays tribute and is subject to the king,
Who could divert into another bed
The river Nile, and thus disaster bring
On Cairo, and on all that region spread
The blight of famine and great suffering.
Senapo by his subjects he is named;
As Prester John among us he is famed.

107

Of all the many kings of this domain
None could compare with him in wealth and might;
But all his wealth and power were in vain
For he had lost that greatest treasure – sight.
This was the very least of all the pain
To which Senapo was condemned: despite
His wealth (if wealthy such a man can be)
He suffered cruel hunger endlessly.

108

If the unhappy man, driven by thirst
 Or a desire for food, drew near the board,
 Avenging harpies, monstrous and accurst,
 Swooped down in an abominable horde.
 With beak and claws they did their hellish worst.
 Viands were snatched away or spilled and poured,
 And when their greedy bellies had been glutted,
 Whatever was left over they polluted.

109

The reason was, the king in his young days,
 Having achieved such honour and such fame,
 Finding himself the subject of much praise,
 And being bolder far than most, became
 As proud as Lucifer; daring to raise
 His eyes against his Maker, and on Him
 Make war, he marched his army many a mile
 Towards the secret sources of the Nile.

110

A mountain stretches far into the skies;
 It soars beyond the clouds, it is so tall.
 And there was the Terrestrial Paradise
 Where Adam dwelt with Eve before the Fall,
 Or so Senapo has been told, who tries
 With camels and with elephants to haul
 His troops up to the summit where some new
 Terrain he hopes to conquer and subdue.

111

But God, beholding such ambition, quells
 The troops' foolhardiness; as they advance,
 He sends an Angel in their midst, who kills
 A hundred thousand; for his arrogance,
 Senapo's eyes are dimmed, and of all Hell's
 Horrendous and accurst inhabitants,
 God sends the harpies, that rapacious brood,
 To steal or to contaminate his food.

112

His torment was increased unendingly
 By a far-seeing sage who prophesied
 Senapo's victuals would no longer be
 Defiled and stolen when a knight astride
 A wingèd horse should come, when all should see
 This marvel through the air serenely ride.
 Such an event appeared impossible
 And so the king was inconsolable.

113

Now, climbing up on every tower and wall,
 The people in amazement see that knight
 Arrive; some of them hurry off to tell
 Senapo of this unexpected sight.
 Their words the fateful prophecy recall.
 Leaving his staff behind in his delight,
 Senapo, with his hands held out before him,
 Goes forth to greet the marvel and adore him.

114

Before the castle gate Astolfo lands,
 First swooping low with many a graceful gyre.
 And when the blind Senapo understands
 He has been brought before the wondrous flyer,
 He kneels and, clasping his imploring hands,
 He cries, 'Angel of God! O new Messiah!
 Though I have sinned, thy heart to me incline.
 To err is human, to forgive divine.

115

'Conscious of all my sins, I do not dare
 To ask if thou wilt give me back my sight,
 Although thou couldst, for thou, I am aware,
 Art of that host in whom God takes delight.
 Let it suffice that I am blind, and spare
 Me now this hunger, added to my plight.
 Chase back to Hell at least this fetid brood
 Which mercilessly robs me of my food.

116

'And I will build for thee a marble shrine
 And set it high upon my citadel.
 The portals and the roof with gold will shine,
 The walls will glow with gems, inside as well
 As out; to honour thee is my design,
 And to commemorate thy miracle.'
 Thus spoke the king, who could not see one jot
 And tried in vain to kiss Astolfo's foot.

117

'I am no Angel from on high, no new
 Messiah,' said Astolfo modestly,
 'I am a mortal and a sinner too,
 Unworthy of the grace vouchsafed to me;
 But what you ask I will attempt to do,
 And if your kingdom of this plague I free,
 You must thank God for it, and Him alone,
 For hither by His guidance I have flown.

118

'To Him belong all honour and all praise,
 To Him', Astolfo said, continuing,
 'Your churches dedicate, your altars raise.'
 He moves towards the castle with the king
 And barons, who pay heed to all he says.
 Senapo orders servitors to bring
 The finest viands, hoping that at least
 For once the harpies will not spoil the feast.

119

At his command a banquet was prepared.
 The hall was fair, the décor richly wrought.
 Only the duke the place of honour shared
 With King Senapo; when the food was brought
 A frightful clamour in the air was heard
 As, beating their vile wings, the harpies sought
 Once more their filthy bodies to obtrude,
 Attracted by the odour of the food.

120

These monsters, who a band of seven formed,
 Had women's faces, lean, as if their jaws
 Had long known hunger; ravenous they swarmed.
 More horrible than death their aspect was.
 Each had wide wings, repulsive and deformed,
 Rapacious hands, with twisted, curving claws,
 A foul distended belly, a long tail
 As convoluted as a serpent's trail.

121

No sooner are they heard than they are seen
 And all together, swooping on the board,
 They overturn the goblets and between
 Their claws snatch up the food; the filthy horde,
 Fouling the tables, leave them so unclean
 The stench which rises cannot be endured.
 Holding his nose, Astolfo seized his blade
 And frequent lunges at the monsters made.

122

One on the neck and one upon the back
 He strikes, one on the wing, one on the breast.
 It has no more effect than on a sack
 Of tow: they are not wounded in the least.
 The strokes fall dead, failing in their attack.
 No dish is left unspoiled of all that feast,
 No cup is left upright, and not till all
 The food is sullied do they leave the hall.

123

The king (who hoped that now his luck would turn,
 And that the duke would drive the fiends away),
 Groaning, bemoans the hour that he was born.
 All hope is gone, extinguished the last ray.
 Astolfo then bethinks him of his horn -
 His help in peril - this will be the way
 To rid Senapo of these pests, and so
 A terrifying blast he means to blow.

124

But first he makes Senapo block his ears
 With molten wax (as all the barons do),
 Lest when that shrill and piercing sound he hears
 He may be driven from his kingdom too.
 Bidding Senapo set aside his fears,
 He leaps upon the hippogriff anew
 And to the steward plainly indicates
 That he should bring more victuals, cups and plates.

125

Accordingly a meal is laid once more,
 On other tables, in another hall.
 The harpies swoop in as they did before
 And greedily upon the viands fall.
 Astolfo sounds his horn; its loud uproar
 The birds cannot endure, and one and all,
 Their ears being unprotected, terrified,
 Heedless of victuals now, they swarm outside.

126

And after them at once Astolfo flies.
 He leaves the citadel of Prester John
 And to the hippogriff his spurs applies.
 The harpies flee: Astolfo follows on,
 Still blasting with the horn which terrifies.
 The harpies make towards the torrid zone
 Where a tall mountain lifts its lofty head
 And where the Nile begins (so it is said).

127

Here almost at the mountain's very root
 There is a passage leading underground.
 Here it is certain if a man sets foot
 The way down into Hell is to be found.
 And here that horde take refuge from pursuit
 And, to escape the horn's tormenting sound,
 All seven hurry to the further shore
 Of the Cocytus, where it's heard no more.

128

And at this murky aperture, which leads
 For ever downwards those who lose the Light,
 Astolfo's horn is silent; ere he speeds
 His destrier on yet another flight,
 Let me defer the story of his deeds,
 As is my custom, till another night.
 My pages now are full, and it is best
 That I should cease my song a while and rest.

CANTO XXXIV

1

O cruel harpies, ever ravenous,
Which on blind, erring Italy descend
To ravage every meal prepared for us,
A punishment perhaps the Powers send
In judgement for our past iniquitous
And vile wrong-doing! Who will now defend
The starving mothers and the innocent,
Robbed by these monsters of their nourishment?

2

He greatly erred who opened wide the cave
Which for so many years was sealed and blocked,
From which these vile and stinking poisons have
Emerged and spread, and Italy have choked.
All peace, all quiet now are in the grave,
All fair, sweet arts of civil life are mocked.
War and its horrors, poverty and tears,
Have reigned since then and will for many years,

3

Until one day, when Italy will shake
Her heedless, hapless children by the hair
And from their long, Lethean slumber wake,
Shouting, 'Is there not one who can compare
With Calais and with Zetes? None to make
Our tables clean again as once they were,
Freed from these stinking monsters' greedy claws,
As Phineus was and as Senapo was?'

4

The paladin the harpies had pursued
And with his horn had scattered them in fright,
And now inside a mountain cave the brood
Had entered and had disappeared from sight.
Astolfo to the aperture had glued
His ear, and, hearing sounds of souls in plight,
Shrieks, wails and lamentations, he could tell –
The evidence was plain – this must be Hell.

5

Astolfo thought that he would enter in
To see those who have lost the light of day,
And search the circles of the realm of sin
Till to Earth's centre he had made his way.
'What should deter me?' said the paladin,
'I have my horn which I can always play.
Pluto and Satan from my path will flee,
And Cerberus, that dog whose heads are three.'

6

And so, dismounting from the hippogriff,
He left it tethered to a little bush,
And entered in, clasping his horn as if
His life depended on it. In a rush
The foul air overwhelmed him like a whiff
Of sulphur or of pitch. Trying to brush
The vapour from his nose and eyes, the duke
On his descent yet further footsteps took.

7

And now the lower down Astolfo goes,
The darker, thicker, murkier the fume,
And stronger steadily his feeling grows
He must return the way that he has come.
But something suddenly (Astolfo knows
Not what) he sees above him in the gloom.
Much like a corpse which in the rain perhaps,
Or wind or sun, has dangled long, it flaps.

8

It was so dark, the duke could scarcely see
 Along the smoky thoroughfare of Hell,
 And what this object in the air might be,
 In his bewilderment, he could not tell.
 In an attempt to solve the mystery,
 He drew his sword to strike it; the blows fell
 Without effect, as though he slashed through mist.
 A spirit it must be, Astolfo guessed.

9

He heard a plaintive voice, which these words spoke:
 'Do not molest us, pray, as you descend,
 Tormented as we are by the black smoke
 Which the infernal fires upward send.'
 Astolfo, stupefied, arrests his stroke
 And to the shade replies, 'As God may end
 The rising of these fumes from deepest Hell,
 Be not displeased about your state to tell.

10

'And if you wish me to take news of you
 Into the world above, I am your knight.'
 The spirit answered, 'To return anew
 By fame into the sweet, life-giving light
 So pleases me that my deep longing to
 Receive this boon urges me to recite
 And pulls my story from me by the roots,
 Though ill such speech my inclination suits.'

11

And she began, 'Sir, I am Lydia,
 Born of the Lydian king to high estate.
 By God's will, to this smoky area
 Eternal condemnation is my fate,
 For, while I lived above in the sweet air,
 For faithful love I gave not love, but hate.
 These regions an infinity contain,
 For a like fault condemned to a like pain.

12

'Harsh Anaxàrete dwells farther on,
 Suffering more torment in a denser fume.
 Her body in the world was turned to stone,
 Her soul to suffer in this realm has come,
 For she could see, unmoved, her lover wan
 Hanged at her door, so desperate become;
 And, near by, Daphne knows how much at last
 She erred to make Apollo run so fast.

13

'If one by one these souls I were to name
 Of the ungrateful women here below,
 It would be long ere to the end I came,
 For to infinity their numbers grow;
 And longer still, if it should be my aim
 To tell you all the men who deeper go
 To a worse place; for their indifference,
 Where flames are hotter, smoke is yet more dense.

14

'Since women are more easily deceived,
 Justice demands that their betrayers should
 Be lower down; he who Medea grieved,
 He who left Ariadne by the flood,
 He who abandoned Dido, have received
 Worse pains, with him who drove to deeds of blood
 Prince Absalom, by raping of Tamar.
 Here erring wives, there erring husbands, are.

15

'But now, to tell you more about the sin
 Which for my punishment has brought me here:
 I was so beautiful and proud that in
 My life on earth I was beyond compare.
 Yet of these two, I know not which would win:
 Beauty and pride, which rivals in me were;
 Since pride, it seemed, continued to arise
 From beauty which was pleasing to all eyes.

16

'There was a cavalier who lived in Thrace,
Esteemed in all the world the best in arms.
So many praised the beauty of my face,
My loveliness of person and my charms,
My image henceforth he could not erase.
A champion, undeterred by war's alarms,
He thought that if he offered me his love,
His valour and brave deeds my heart would move.

17

'He came to Lydia; by a stronger noose,
Soon as he saw my beauty, he was caught,
And, from these bonds unable to get loose,
He served my father, and so well he fought,
So varied were his valiant deeds, the news
Of them on the swift wings of Fame was brought.
Long would it take to say all he deserved,
If but a grateful monarch he had served!

18

'Pamphilia, Caria, Cilicia
Were conquered for my father by the knight,
For never was the army sent to war
Unless he judged that they would win the fight.
So, having now a cornucopia
Bestowed, he asked my father, as of right,
If in reward for so much toil and strife
He would consent that I should be his wife.

19

'He was rejected by the king, who aimed
To marry me to one of high degree,
Not to a knight-at-arms, however famed,
Possessed of nothing but his gallantry.
By avarice, that sin which is acclaimed
The school of vice, the king is ruled, and he
Appreciates good deeds about as much
As tunes upon a lyre a donkey touch.

20

'But when Alcestes, he of whom I speak,
Received this snub, his anger was intense.
He felt that he was injured to the quick
By such ingratitude and insolence;
And, not disposed to turn the other cheek,
Vowed he would bring his lord to penitence,
And to Armenia's king, our enemy,
He went, and stirred up his hostility.

21

'And to such enmity he roused the king
That on my father he made war; Alcest,
So celebrated for his soldiering,
As captain of those troops was judged the best;
And all the spoils he promised he would bring
To the Armenian monarch, but, his breast
Still burning to enjoy my fair young limbs,
Those for himself as a reward he claims.

22

'He caused the king, my father, in that war
More injury than I could ever tell.
Four armies in one year defeated are:
He leaves him not a town or citadel,
Except for one which perpendicular
And lofty walls render impregnable.
Therein the king, with those whom he loves best,
Flees with what treasure can be snatched in haste.

23

'Our adversary then besieged us there.
By dint of his assault and battery
He soon reduced my father to despair,
Who willingly would then have bartered me
As wife, and servant too, and named him heir
To half his kingdom, if he might go free:
Seeing how low the stores of victuals were,
He knew that he would die a prisoner.

24

'Before this happens, he resolves to try
 Whatever remedy seems possible.
 As his first hope, he chooses me, and I,
 Whose beauty was the cause of so much ill,
 To parley with Alcestes go; and my
 Intention is to do my father's will:
 To plead with him to take me as his wife,
 And half our kingdom, for an end to strife.

25

'Alcestes, having heard of my intent,
 Proceeds towards me, pale and tremulous,
 More like a captive in whom hope is spent
 Than a commander so victorious.
 The words which I now use are different
 From those I planned before I saw him thus,
 And when the situation I discern
 I change my tactics as I see him burn.

26

'So I begin to curse his love for me
 And to lament what it has brought us to:
 My father victim of his cruelty,
 Myself a hostage: this (I said) was due
 To his decision to use force; if he
 Had been content, I added, to pursue
 His former ways, so pleasing to us all,
 I had been his after an interval.

27

'For, though my father had at first refused
 The honourable wish he had expressed
 (Of stubbornness the king might be accused
 And never would he grant a first request),
 He did not thus deserve to be abused
 With such ferocious anger; for the rest,
 I said, still braver deeds he should have tried
 To win the boon my father had denied.

28

'And had my father still ungrateful proved,
 I should have prayed and urged him in my turn
 To let me wed the cavalier I loved;
 And if he had continued still to spurn
 All our entreaties, and remained unmoved,
 We should have wed in secret; but the stern,
 Unyielding course that he had chosen then
 Had changed my mind, nor could it change again.

29

'Although I had come forth to speak with him,
 Moved to compassion by my father's plight,
 No fruit would ever grow on such a stem,
 For never now his love would I requite;
 And sooner would I let him tear me limb
 From limb than in my person take delight
 And on my body satisfy his lust.
 By force first overpower me he must.

30

'These words I used and others similar,
 Knowing what power over him I had.
 Repentant he became and humbler far
 Than any saint or hermit; then he made
 Obeisance, and, like a prisoner,
 Kneeling he drew and handed me a blade.
 I was to take revenge with it, he said,
 For all his evil deeds and strike him dead.

31

'Finding him in this state, I formed a plan
 To follow through my triumph to the end.
 I let him hope that, if as he began
 He now continues, I will be his friend
 And grant those joys desired by every man,
 If he agrees his errors to amend:
 My father's kingdom he must first restore,
 Then win my love by loyalty, not war.

32

'He gave his word and to our citadel
He sent me back, untouched, as I set out.
He did not dare to kiss me, such the spell
By which I bound him, for beyond all doubt
Cupid, as you can see, was aiming well
And still more arrows was prepared to shoot.
He then departed to negotiate
With the Armenian king he'd served of late.

33

'And with the utmost courtesy he speaks,
Entreating him to leave my father his
Now ravaged kingdom and, no more to vex
Him, to withdraw behind the boundaries
Of old Armenia; scarlet in both cheeks,
The angry king is deaf to all such pleas:
He will not end the war which has been planned
The while my father has one inch of land.

34

'And if some whining woman's wily ways
Have made Alcestes alter his design,
So much the worse for him, the monarch says.
He for his part refuses to resign
Their hard-won gains. Once more the other prays:
His words, he sees, are useless (unlike mine).
First he laments, then vows the king will rue it,
For willy-nilly he will force him to it.

35

'His anger grew, and soon from threats he passed
To actions even worse and angrier.
He drew his sword against the king at last,
Though countless of his nobles present were,
And ran him through as they looked on aghast,
Helpless to aid him or to interfere.
And he defeated the Armenian troops
With Thracians whom he paid, and other groups.

36

'After one month and at his own expense
(And not one penny did my father pay),
Our kingdom he restores; in recompense
For widespread ruin under which it lay,
Not only costly booty he presents,
But makes Armenia heavy tribute pay,
With Cappadocia which borders it,
While to his raids Hyrcanians submit.

37

'No triumph for Alcestes had we planned,
But plotted how to kill him, though at first,
Since he had many friends, we held our hand,
Knowing a chance would come to do our worst.
Day after day I said I loved him and
With female guile his fondest hopes I nursed;
But other foes, I say, he must bring low
Ere the sweet joys he longed for he could know.

38

'I send him here, I send him there, alone
Or with few troops, on many a strange task
Or perilous adventure, from which none
But he would e'er return, but all I ask
He does, killing the monsters, every one,
And earning glory in which heroes bask.
By cannibals and giants he is tested
With which my father's kingdom is infested.

39

'Not Hercules such labours had to face
For King Eurystheus or for Juno, in
Nemea, Erymanthus, Lerna, Thrace,
Aetolian valleys and Numidian,
By Tiber, Ebro - whatsoe'er the place.
The tasks which he performed could not begin
To rival those on which my swain I sent
With winsome words and murderous intent.

40

'And when my plan has failed in its effect,
I choose another, which is better still.
The minds of those who love him I infect
With poison, and such hatred I instil,
His reputation in their eyes is wrecked.
His greatest joy is to obey my will.
I raise my finger: at my side he stands
And blindly he performs my least commands.

41

'When by these means I see that I have rid
My father of all enemies, and not
One friend, because of everything I did,
Stands by Alcestes, then I tell him what
(Until this moment came) from him I hid:
That he has been the victim of a plot,
That ineradicable is my hate
And his demise with joy I contemplate.

42

'I thought the matter over carefully:
If my intention was too plainly shown
I might incur a name for cruelty
(Too many knew the deeds which he had done).
And so I banished him from sight of me
(I judged this deprivation would alone
Suffice); no letter would I read of his,
And turned a deaf ear to all messages.

43

'And my ingratitude such bitter pain
Inflicted on him that his spirit broke.
When he had pleaded many times in vain,
Illness confined him to his bed; he spoke
No more, and soon he died, by sorrow slain.
And now I weep and on my face the smoke
Has left a tinge that is indelible,
For no redemption can be found in Hell.'

44

Thus the unhappy Lydia ends her tale.
The duke moves onward to seek other souls,
But the avenging fog, like a thick veil,
As he advances, still more thickly rolls.
Soon not a handbreadth farther down the vale
Can he proceed; the smoke his senses dulls.
Not only must his footsteps be retraced,
But if he wants to live he must make haste.

45

And, striding rapidly, he seems to run,
Not walk, as he completes his upward climb
To where his journey to Inferno was begun.
He sees the aperture in a short time
Where the dark air is tempered by the sun.
Escaping breathless from the choking grime,
From the vile depths where he has been confined
He clambers forth, leaving the smoke behind.

46

And that those greedy pests may never more
Return, Astolfo gathers stones and rocks,
From pepper- and amomum-trees a store
Of branches cuts, and with these sticks and stocks
He makes a wall and hedge to bar the door;
So well this aperture Astolfo blocks,
The harpies will not find it possible
To make their exit thence again from Hell.

47

While he had visited that murky place,
The black smoke rising from the burning pitch
Not only stained Astolfo's hands and face
But worse, it left an inner blemish which
Was hidden by his clothes; searching apace,
He found a spring at last in a small niche.
In this, to cleanse away the grime and soot,
Astolfo washed himself from head to foot.

48

Seated upon the hippogriff again,
 Away into the air Astolfo flies.
 The mountain's summit he intends to gain,
 Which almost to the moon is said to rise.
 Now for the solid earth he feels disdain,
 Ascending ever higher in the skies.
 He does not once look down, nor does he stop
 Until he lands upon the very top.

49

Sapphires and rubies, pearls and topazes,
 Diamond, jacinth, chrysolite and gold
 Might be compared with flowers which the breeze
 Has painted there; and could we here behold
 Those grassy slopes which now Astolfo sees,
 The green would brighter seem than emerald.
 The branches of the trees are no less fair,
 Bright with the blossoms or the fruit they bear.

50

The little song-birds a sweet concert make
 And gay their multi-coloured feathers gleam.
 Clearer than crystal shines a quiet lake,
 Translucent flows an ever-murmuring stream.
 The foliage the breezes softly shake.
 So constant, so unfaltering they seem,
 The air so tremulous at their caress,
 That nowhere can the heat of day oppress.

51

From flowers, fruit and grass the breezes stole
 The varied perfumes, wafting to and fro;
 And on this mingled sweetness fed the soul
 Which only this delight desired to know.
 Midway along a plain, upon a knoll,
 A palace stood; with flame it seemed to glow.
 Such light and splendour by its walls were cast,
 All mortal buildings by it are surpassed.

52

Astolfo slowly rides towards the pile
 And gazes on the wondrous monument.
 It stretches, he observes, for many a mile,
 For more than thirty is circumferent.
 The beauty of the landscape and the style
 Of the fair palace (so he argued) meant
 Our fetid world by Heaven abhorred must be,
 So sweet and fair that other is to see.

53

And when he next observes how luminous
 The palace is, what can he do but stare?
 A single gem, carved by a Daedalus,
 Brighter and ruddier than rubies are!
 Stupendous fabric! Nothing built by us
 With structure such as this could we compare.
 Let everyone be silent who would try
 The seven wonders here to glorify.

54

And on the threshold of that house of bliss
 An elder stands to greet the duke; his gown
 Is white as milk, redder his mantle is
 Than minium, silver his hair, and down
 His breast extends a snowy beard, which his
 Ethereal aspect heightens, while a crown
 Of light irradiates him in such wise
 He seems of the elect of Paradise.

55

The duke approached on foot, in reverence,
 And with a joyful face the elder said:
 'A will divine, O paladin, consents
 That on the earthly paradise you tread.
 Why you have come, nor where you go from hence,
 You have not heard, but do not be misled:
 For long predestined was your journey here
 From the far distant northern hemisphere.

56

'To rescue Christendom and Charlemagne
From present peril of the Infidel
You have been brought on high to this terrain.
Be now advised by what I have to tell:
Courage and knowledge would have been in vain,
My son – your horn, your wingèd horse as well;
Nothing could help you to attain this height
If God did not so will it in His might.

57

'We shall discuss it later at our ease,
When I shall tell you what you have to do.
First take refreshment with us, if you please.
So long a fast is wearisome for you.'
And he proceeded, with such words as these,
The duke's surprise and wonder to renew;
And in the end the greatest marvel came
When the old man revealed his saintly name.

58

For he was the Evangelist, that John
Whom Christ so loved that the belief was spread
That when his span of years was past and gone
He would not die, because these words were said
To Peter the Apostle by God's Son:
'If he await me, why art thou dismayed?'
Although He did not say: 'He will not die',
Yet we see plainly what His words imply.

59

For he ascended to this mountain where
Enoch the patriarch had come to dwell.
Elijah, the great prophet, too was there
Who has not perished but is living still.
And far beyond our pestilential air
They will enjoy eternal Spring until
The trumpets from on high shall sound aloud
And Christ shall come again on a white cloud.

60

With gracious hospitality the knight
Was welcomed to a chamber by the saints.
The hippogriff was stabled for the night.
With corn in plenty, it had no complaints.
And when Astolfo tasted the delight
Of fruits of paradise, of the constraints
On our first parents he revised his views:
Their disobedience he could excuse.

61

When the adventurous duke had satisfied
His natural needs for food and for repose
(With every comfort he had been supplied),
Aurora from her husband's bed arose
(Despite his age her love has never died,
But as he older, she the fonder, grows).
Astolfo, rising too, saw standing near
The loved disciple Jesus held so dear.

62

Clasping Astolfo's hand, of things he spoke
Which I in silence deem it best to pass;
And then he said, 'My son, the Christian folk
In France (more than you know) are in distress,
For you must learn that your Orlando took
The wrong direction and is now, alas!,
Enduring retribution, for God sends
Dire punishment when one He loves offends.

63

'On your Orlando God bestowed at birth
The greatest strength and courage, and beyond
The usage of all combatants on earth,
His body cannot suffer any wound.
Our holy Faith's Defender, he stands forth,
And so appointed by God's mighty bond,
Like Samson, champion of the Hebrew lines
Against their enemies, the Philistines.

64

'But your Orlando for his gifts has made
To his Creator but a poor return.
The more it was his duty to lend aid,
The more the Faithful have been left forlorn.
His blinding passion for a pagan maid
This Christian knight of judgement has so shorn
That cruelly his cousin twice he fought
And with impiety his death has sought.

65

'And God for this has caused him to run mad,
With sides and chest and belly stripped and bare
(So that his foes have reason to be glad),
Of others and himself quite unaware;
And a like retribution, I will add,
Nebuchadnezzar was obliged to bear
For seven years, when, as the Bible says,
On pasture, like an ox, God made him graze.

66

'Since the wrong-doings of the paladin
Are less to be condemned, so they incurred
Less retribution than the monarch's sin;
And, for the ways in which Orlando erred,
A sentence of three months was passed, and in
This period his intellect was blurred.
And now God wills that you from us shall learn
How you can make Orlando's wits return.

67

'Another journey I must take you on,
Leaving the earth beneath us far below,
Until we reach the circle of the moon -
The nearest of the planets, as you know.
The only means to cure Orlando soon
Is hidden there and that is why we go.
And when the moon is riding high tonight
We shall set out together on our flight.'

68

Of this and other matters with the duke
St John Evangelist discoursed that day;
But when the sun the western world forsook,
The moon her horn had started to display.
Then that same chariot which in God's Book
From the Judaeen mountains bore away
Elijah out of sight of mortal eyes
Is now made ready for the enterprise.

69

Four chestnut steeds, shining and ruddier
Than flame, the saint first harnessed to the coach
And, seated now beside his passenger,
He takes the reins and at his skilful touch
The horses rise; first, like a hoverer,
The chariot rotates, then they approach
The sphere of fire, and by a miracle
They are not burned or singed, and all is well.

70

When they have left the ring of fire behind,
They reach the kingdom of the moon, which bright
As spotless steel, for the most part, they find,
Equal (though somewhat smaller) in their sight
To our own globe, the last of those confined
Within the circling spheres, although not quite
Identical, for if that were to be
The moon would be encompassed by the sea.

71

Astolfo had two reasons for surprise:
First, that the kingdom of the lunar sphere
Should be so large, when such a tiny size
Its circle seems to us when glimpsed from here;
Next, that he had to screw up both his eyes
To see the globe we live on plain and clear.
Since earth and ocean have no proper light,
Their image does not rise to a great height.

72

There, other lakes and rivers, other rills
 From ours down here on earth are to be found,
 And other plains and valleys, other hills.
 Cities and castles on the moon abound;
 The size of houses with amazement fills
 The paladin; extending all around
 Are deep and solitary forests where
 Diana's huntress-nymphs pursue the deer.

73

The duke did not delay to view each sight,
 For that was not the aim of his ascent.
 Between two mountains of prodigious height
 The travellers to a deep valley went.
 What by our fault, or Time's relentless flight,
 Or Fortune's chances, or by accident
 (Whatever be the cause) we lose down here,
 Miraculously is assembled there.

74

Not only wealth and kingdoms, which the wheel
 Of Fortune whirls at random among men,
 But what she has no power to give or steal,
 Such as the following, I also mean:
 Tatters of fame are there, on which a meal
 Is made (the tooth of Time is sharp and keen);
 Prayers to God and penitential vows
 Which sinners make with humbled knees and brows,

75

The tears of lovers and their endless sighs,
 The moments lost in empty games of chance,
 Vain projects none could ever realize,
 The fruitless idleness of ignorance,
 And unfulfilled desire – which occupies
 More room than all the rest and more expense:
 In short, whatever has been lost on earth
 Is found upon the moon, for what it's worth.

76

Between the garnered heaps Astolfo passed,
 Asking to be enlightened by his guide.
 He heard the whistling shriek and gusty blast
 Of swollen bladders; these, St John replied,
 Had once been crowns, by monarchs worn, long past,
 Who once were celebrated far and wide,
 Whose very names now scarce remembered are,
 Of Persia, Greece, Lydia, Assyria.

77

Fish-hooks of gold and silver, a vast hoard
 Of treasure, were the futile offerings,
 Made in the hope of mercy or reward,
 To patrons, avaricious princes, kings.
 Garlands with hidden snares were praises poured
 In adulation, like the chirrupings
 Of cicadas which, empty now and spent,
 The homage sung by poets represent.

78

Fetters of gold and bonds with gems encrusted
 Were fruitless love-affairs pursued in vain.
 Talons of eagles were the powers entrusted
 To eager toadies by their sovereign.
 The princely favours for which minions lusted
 And granted favours willingly to gain
 (No longer prized when youth had lost its bloom),
 Were bellows filled with empty air and fume.

79

Ruins of cities and of fortresses
 Lay scattered all about, with precious stores,
 Plots ill-contrived, broken alliances,
 Feuds and vendettas and abortive wars,
 Serpents whose faces had the semblances
 Of thieves and coiners and seductive whores.
 Phials lay broken – he saw many sorts –
 The futile service of ungrateful courts.

80

And pools of soup from many basins spilled
 (Such was the explanation of St John)
 Were all bequests which dying persons willed
 For charitable ends; then, moving on,
 They passed a heap of flowers which once filled
 The air with perfume but turned putrid soon.
 This was the gift (if such it can be said)
 Which Constantine to Pope Sylvester made.

81

Traps, snares and lures, he saw, besmeared with lime.
 These, ladies, your sweet charms and graces were.
 But if I weave a pattern in my rhyme
 Of all the things shown to Astolfo there,
 Unending it will be and long the time.
 Every event in life, every affair
 Is found, with one exception, on the moon:
 Never will madness from the earth be gone.

82

Some days the duke had lost next caught his eye;
 Some of his deeds which he performed in vain,
 St John interpreted as they walked by;
 And what we think we never lose, I mean
 Our wits (for *them* we raise no prayers on high),
 Towering like a mountain on the plain,
 Exceeded all the other smaller mounds
 In which the kingdom of the moon abounds.

83

A liquid, thin and clear, Astolfo sees,
 Distilled in many vases, large and small,
 Which must (so volatile the fluid is)
 Be tightly corked; the largest of them all
 Contains the greatest of those essences:
 The mind of mad Anglante, of whose fall
 You are aware and of his frenzied fits.
 And on it the duke read: 'Orlando's wits'.

84

On other bottles too the names are shown
 To whom the wits belong. To his surprise,
 Astolfo finds a great part of his own;
 And, more astonished still, before his eyes
 He sees the wits of those he thought had none.
 But this his first impression verifies:
 That little wit they must retain down here
 If such a quantity is found up there.

85

Some lose their wits for love, some for reward
 Of fame, still others scour the seas for gain;
 Another hopes for favours from his lord;
 Others in futile magic trust in vain;
 Some paintings treasure, others jewels hoard;
 All for their hearts' desire have gone insane:
 Astrologers and sophists by the score
 Have lost their reason, poets too, still more.

86

Astolfo takes his wits (for this St John
 Allows); putting the bottle to his nose,
 He sniffs, and to their former place they run;
 And Turpin says (and I believe he knows)
 Astolfo lived more wisely from then on,
 Save for one error, as I will disclose,
 Which later made him lose his wits again
 And all his friends' remonstrances were vain.

87

The largest, fullest bottle, which contained
 Orlando's wits, Astolfo also took.
 He found these were less easily attained
 (Since they were higher up); before the duke
 Descended from the moon, and earth regained,
 The author of the apocalyptic book
 Led him to where a river ran beside
 A palace, and invited him inside.

88

Fleeces and bales were stacked in every room,
 Of flax, of silk, of cotton and of wool,
 Bright-hued, or sombre with the tones of doom.
 A white-haired woman wound a spindleful
 Of skeins from all these fibres, as when some
 Young country lass the moistened spoils will pull
 From the cocoons in summer-time anew,
 When the silk-harvest of the year is due.

89

When all the fibre from one fleece is gone,
 The next is brought; the worst and the best thread
 Are separated by another crone
 (For she who winds it pays no heed to grade).
 'What work is this?' Astolfo asked St John.
 'The two old women are the Fates,' he said,
 'They the divinities immortal are
 Who spin your mortal lives from stamina.

90

'Long as a skein endures, so long will last
 A human life, and not one moment more.
 Death takes away the fibres of the past,
 And Nature's watchful task is to restore.
 And by the second Fate the threads are classed.
 Some will adorn the robes of souls before
 The heavenly throne, but the defective will
 Be fashioned as harsh bonds for those in Hell.'

91

The spindles, full of fibres to be spun,
 And for their several uses set aside,
 Were tagged with little disks; on every one,
 Iron, silver, gold, a name could be descried.
 And as the progress of the work went on,
 Untiring to and fro an old man plied,
 Taking away the spindles from the store
 And always coming back again for more.

So swift and nimble was that ancient man,
 You would have thought he had been born to race;
 And to reduce that heap appeared his plan,
 Decreasing it as he increased his pace.
 The reason why he did and where he ran
 I'll tell you at some other time and place,
 If I receive a welcome sign from you
 That I should take my story up anew.

36

Astolfo and his noble company
 Who dined and talked together in his tent
 Put on their arms and mounted instantly
 And to the source of the commotion went,
 Hoping along the way some signs to see
 Of what the nature was of the event.
 They come to where they see a man so savage
 That, naked, the whole army he could ravage.

37

He whirled a heavy cudgel round and round,
 Of solid wood, and in so firm a grasp,
 Each time it fell, a man dropped to the ground.
 More than a hundred lay at their last gasp,
 Whom Death at this unguarded moment found
 And carried off inert in a chill clasp.
 Arrows were shot at him from far away,
 But nobody for his approach would stay.

38

Dudone, Brandimarte and the duke,
 With Oliver, towards the tumult sped.
 The strength and spirit of the savage struck
 Them with a sense of marvel mixed with dread;
 And, while on that stupendous force they look,
 Attired in black as if she mourned the dead
 A damsel gallops up - and to her heart
 With both her arms embraces Brandimart.

39

This was fair Fiordiligi, who so burned
 With love that Rodomonte's penalty,
 Which robbed her of the one for whom she yearned,
 Brought her with grief near to insanity.
 Then from his cunning captor she had learned
 That he had sent her love across the sea,
 In company with many cavaliers
 To languish in a prison in Algiers.

40

At Marseilles, on the point of setting sail,
 She saw a ship arrive from the Levant.
 On board was a retainer, old and frail,
 Once of the household of King Monodant.
 He had sought Brandimart, to no avail,
 By land, by sea, a questing immigrant;
 Then news of him in France he heard at last
 And so just now to Europe he had passed.

41

She recognized him as Bardino, who
 Had stolen Brandimart when he was small.
 (To manhood in Silvana he then grew,
 Having no knowledge of his home at all.)
 So when Bardino's aim the damsel knew,
 She asked his help; and in the interval
 She told him what the circumstances were
 And how her love was taken prisoner.

42

When they had landed on the Afric shore,
 News reached them of Astolfo's victory.
 Of Brandimarte's fate they were not sure,
 But rumour had it he had been set free.
 Fair Fiordiligi, seeing him before
 Her very eyes, with spontaneity
 Rushed to reveal how all her former sadness
 Served to intensify her present gladness.

43

No less delight the noble cavalier
 Experienced on seeing his dear wife.
 She was more precious to him and more dear
 Than any thing or person in his life.
 He clasps and tenderly embraces her
 And would have never ceased from kissing if
 He had not seen, on lifting up his eyes,
 Bardino standing there, to his surprise.

44

With open arms to welcome him he strode,
 Intending to enquire why he had come;
 But he was interrupted ere he could,
 By the aforesaid pandemonium.
 The bludgeon brandished by the savage nude
 In a wide ring created ample room.
 Then Fiordiligi, turning to confront
 The naked man, called out, 'It is the Count!'

45

At the same moment too the English duke
 By certain signs the Count could recognize,
 For which the holy ancients bade him look
 Up yonder in the Terrestrial Paradise.
 His former noble aspect so forsook
 Him now, they'd ne'er have known him otherwise.
 And for so long his body he disdains,
 His face is like a beast's, more than a man's.

46

Astolfo, pierced by pity through his breast,
 Turned, weeping, to Dudone who was near,
 And then to Oliver and all the rest
 And, pointing, cried, 'That is Orlando there!'
 To recognize him they all did their best,
 Eyeing him with a fixed, unblinking stare.
 To find him in this terrible condition
 Fills all of them with stupor and contrition.

47

They wept to see the state the Count was in,
 So grievous, they could not imagine worse.
 'Now is the time to give him medicine,'
 Astolfo says, 'not tears,' and from his horse
 He leaps. And soon no less than five are seen
 Converging in a group with headlong force
 To seize King Charles's nephew, hoping to
 Control his madness and his rage subdued.

48

Orlando, seeing them round him in a ring,
 Wielded his cudgel like a maniac.
 Dudone, with his buckler covering
 His head, moved closer, and a heavy whack
 Taught him the foolishness of such a thing.
 But for the blade of Oliver, the crack,
 Though devastating, would have been still more so,
 And would have split shield, helmet, head and torso.

49

It only broke his shield, but such a thump
 It landed on his helmet that he fell.
 The sword of Sansonetto to a stump
 Reduced the club, chopping it by an ell.
 Then Brandimarte seized him by the rump
 With both his arms, as tight as possible;
 And while he pinions thus Orlando's flanks
 Astolfo holds him firmly by the shanks.

50

Orlando gave a jerk: the Englishman
 Ten paces off upon his beam-end landed;
 But Brandimart he does not find he can
 Dislodge; his body-grip is iron-handed.
 When Oliver too close unheeding ran,
 Orlando gave him just what he demanded,
 And knocked him senseless; ashy pale he lies,
 The life-blood gushing from his nose and eyes.

51

And if his helmet had not been robust
 That would have been the end of Oliver;
 Even as it was, he lay unconscious, just
 As if his soul had joined the heavenly sphere.
 Dudone and the duke rise from the dust
 (A swollen face the son of Ugier
 Presents), and on the Count, with Sansonet
 Who neatly chopped the club, once more they set.