

# ORLANDO FURIOSO (THE FRENZY OF ORLANDO)



*A Romantic Epic by  
Ludovico Ariosto*

**PART ONE**



**TRANSLATED  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
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**PENGUIN BOOKS**

32

The Maid was loved by a brave cavalier  
 Vowed to the service of the African.  
 He was the scion of the old Ruggier  
 By Agolante's daughter who such pain  
 And sorrow suffered; from no cruel bear  
 Or lion sprung, the Maid did not disdain  
 The love of such a knight, although their fate  
 Once only has permitted them to meet.

33

He shares his father's name and pedigree.  
 And now in search of him she goes her way,  
 As safe, though unescorted, as if she  
 A thousand squadrons had in her array.  
 When she had fought Circassia's king and he  
 Had kissed our ancient mother, as men say,  
 She crossed a wood and afterwards a hill,  
 Then came at last upon a lovely rill.

34

A stream which through a water-meadow flows,  
 Where age-old trees provide a grateful shade,  
 With pleasing murmuring invites all those  
 Who pass to drink and linger in the glade,  
 While to the left a hill with terraced rows  
 Gives shelter from the noon-day sun. The Maid,  
 Turning her lovely eyes upon the scene,  
 A cavalier reclining there has seen.

35

Alone and silent, with a pensive brow,  
 Reposing in a shady grove beside  
 A green and flowery bank, he watches how  
 The limpid, crystal waters slowly glide.  
 His shield and helm are hanging on a bough;  
 His charger to the tree is also tied.  
 His eyes are moist with tears, his face held low,  
 And all his air betokens grief and woe.

36

The longing we all harbour in our heart  
 To learn about another man's affairs  
 Urges the Maid to ask him to impart  
 The reason for his sorrows and his cares.  
 He willingly relates the whole from start  
 To finish and his troubles with her shares,  
 For from her noble bearing at first sight  
 He takes her for a truly valiant knight.

37

And he began: 'Good sir, as I was leading  
 My troops of cavalry and foot to where  
 King Charles was camped, the Moor's advance  
 impeding,  
 And as a lady I escorted there,  
 For whom, alas! my stricken heart is bleeding,  
 Close to Rodonnes I noticed in the air  
 A knight in armour on a horse with wings,  
 Wheeling in wide and then decreasing rings.

38

'This thief – whether he was a mortal being  
 Or an infernal fiend I cannot say –  
 My lovely and beloved lady seeing,  
 As when a falcon swoops to seize its prey,  
 Dropped like a plummet and, the soldiers fleeing,  
 The startled damsel snatched and bore away.  
 The whole of this assault escaped my eye  
 Until I heard her calling from on high.

39

'So the rapacious kite swoops down upon  
 The helpless chick which flutters near its dam.  
 For all her squawks and flappings when it's gone,  
 She cannot call it back, the poor beldam!  
 Likewise, how can I hope to follow one  
 Who flies, hemmed in by mountains as I am?  
 Among such rocky paths my weary horse  
 With laggard steps plods a reluctant course.

72

And when the traitor knew his first design,  
 For all his careful plans, would be in vain,  
 To kill or leave her there, or to combine  
 Two such betrayals, he began again  
 To weave a strange new scheme; first, to refine  
 His treachery, he hastened to explain  
 That in that deep and dark and hollow place  
 He glimpsed a damsel with a winsome face.

73

From her fair aspect and her costly gown,  
 She seemed of noble and of high degree;  
 But by her attitude of grief she'd shown  
 That she resided there unwillingly.  
 When, to learn more about her, he'd begun  
 The steep descent into the cavity,  
 Her captor from the inner chamber stepped  
 And forced her back again, for all she wept.

74

Fair Bradamante, who's as credulous  
 As she is brave, believes his every word.  
 She longs to be of help, but perilous  
 She knows descent will be without a cord.  
 Then on an elm-tree she sees pendulous  
 A long and leafy branch; with her sharp sword  
 She quickly cuts it from the parent bole  
 And lowers it with care into the hole.

75

The severed end she gave to Pinabel  
 To hold, and, climbing down, herself suspended,  
 Feet first, into the cavity, until  
 She dangled at full length, her arms extended.  
 He, smiling, asked the Maid if she jumped well,  
 Then flung his hands apart, as he'd intended,  
 Shouting in triumph: 'Perish all your breed,  
 And would I might deal thus with all their seed!'

76

The fate of her whom Pinabel thus cursed  
 Proved other than his traitor's heart had hoped.  
 Reaching the bottom of the cavern first,  
 The sturdy branch, though breaking as it dropped,  
 Softened her fall and saved her from the worst.  
 Thus his design to kill the Maid was stopped.  
 Unconscious for a space of time she lay,  
 And how she later fared I'll later say.

## CANTO IV

1

Although deceit is mostly disapproved,  
Seeming to show a mind malevolent,  
Many a time it brings, as has been proved,  
Advantages that are self-evident,  
And mortal threats and dangers has removed.  
Not all we meet with are benevolent  
In this our life, so full of envious spite,  
And gloomier by far than it is bright.

2

If long experience and labour too  
Are indispensable before you find  
A friend who's staunch, reliable and true,  
To whom you would confide your inmost mind,  
What is Ruggiero's lovely Maid to do?  
To Brunel's trickery she is not blind.  
She knows his villainy for what it is.  
Through all his sly pretence, forewarned, she sees.

3

She too dissembles, as the case demands  
With one who is the father of all lies,  
And on his thieving and rapacious hands,  
As I remarked before, she keeps her eyes.  
Then suddenly a mighty uproar rends  
The air. The Maid exclaims, 'Lord of the skies!  
O Virgin Mother! What is all this din?'  
And with these words, she rushes from the inn.

4

She sees the host and all his household there,  
Some at the windows, others in the street.  
Faces up-turned, into the sky they stare,  
As if a comet or eclipse to greet.  
So marvellous a wonder in the air  
The Maid beholds that few will credit it:  
A horse with wings and of enormous size,  
Which bears a knight in armour as it flies.

5

Its wings were wide and of the strangest hue.  
Between them sat a knight, from heel to crest  
In shining armour, polished as if new.  
Keeping a steady course towards the west,  
Beyond the hills he disappeared from view.  
This cavalier, the host informed his guest,  
Was a magician (here the truth he spoke),  
And, far or near, this was the route he took.

6

Sometimes high up among the stars he flies.  
At other times close to the ground he'll skim,  
And any lovely women whom he spies  
He snatches up and carries off with him.  
The wretched damsels he so terrifies  
That any who are beautiful, or deem  
They are (he takes whichever he can get),  
Remain indoors until the sun has set.

7

'He has a castle in the Pyrenees,'  
The host continued, 'built by magic art  
Of shining steel; so beautiful it is,  
In the whole world there is no counterpart.  
Of all the cavaliers who visit this  
Enchanted palace, none, they say, depart.  
It's my belief, good sir, I greatly fear,  
They're put to death or held as captives there.'

8

Fair Bradamante to his words attends,  
 And it is well, for sooner now than late  
 The magic of the ring the Maid intends  
 To try (and to succeed will be her fate).  
 'Have you a guide', she asks, 'among your friends?  
 I must be gone, my longing is so great  
 To challenge this magician to a fight  
 And test my strength against his magic might.'

9

'You need not lack a guide,' Brunello said;  
 'I'll come with you and keep you company.  
 I have instructions of the road ahead  
 And other aids of use to you and me.'  
 He meant the ring, but he left that unsaid  
 (To speak of it, he thought, unwise would be).  
 'Gladly,' replies the Maid (her meaning is  
 The ring will soon be hers, no longer his).

10

What it was good to say she said; on all  
 That might endanger her she's wisely mum.  
 The landlord had a charger in his stall,  
 In battle strong, and roadworthy. The sum  
 Required she pays, and buys the animal.  
 And when the light of a new day has come  
 She takes her way along a narrow vale,  
 Brunel now at her head, now at her tail.

11

Mounting from hill to hill, from wood to wood,  
 They climb at last to where the Pyrenees  
 Reveal, if visibility is good,  
 Both France and Spain, together with both seas,  
 As on the Apennines whoever stood  
 Near the Camaldoli could view with ease  
 Two coastlines. By a harsh and weary route  
 They clamber downwards to the valley's foot.

12

A massive cliff, its top encircled by  
 A wall of steel, they gaze at from below.  
 Towards the heavens it ascends so high,  
 All near-by peaks, compared with it, seem low.  
 Those who would visit it need wings, to fly,  
 Else wasted effort it would be to go.  
 Brunello said, 'Here's where the sorcerer  
 Holds cavaliers and ladies prisoner.'

13

The walls on every side as steeply drop  
 As if by line and plummet built, four-square.  
 No steps (it seems) give access to the top.  
 Winged creatures only can inhabit there.  
 This is the place where they must make their stop.  
 The hour has come, the valiant Maid's aware,  
 For her to take possession of the ring  
 And kill Brunello without dallying.

14

And yet a coward's act to her it seems  
 To kill a man so lowly, and unarmed.  
 To take possession of the ring she schemes  
 And leave Brunello helpless but unharmed.  
 Of what's in store for him he little dreams.  
 Before he has the time to feel alarmed,  
 He's seized and fastened to a giant fir,  
 The magic ring surrendered up to her.

15

His tears, his groans, his chagrins and his woes  
 On valiant Bradamante have no power,  
 And down the mountain path she slowly goes  
 Till in the plain she stands beneath the tower.  
 There, a defiance on her horn she blows,  
 Which brings the necromancer from his bower.  
 Her challenge sounded, next with many a shout,  
 With many a threat, she boldly calls him out.

## 16

Not long the man of sorcery delayed  
 When he had heard the challenge of the horn.  
 On his winged horse, towards the warrior Maid,  
 Whom he believes to be a man, he's borne.  
 She at first sight of him is not afraid.  
 Keeping him well in view, she could have sworn  
 He had no lance, no sword, no club to harm her,  
 No weapon which could pierce or break her armour.

## 17

His shield in a vermilion cloth was draped.  
 In his right hand he held an open book,  
 Whence marvellous phenomena he shaped:  
 A lance which hurtled through the air and took  
 His adversary by surprise, who gaped  
 At nothingness, with an astonished look;  
 Or with a dagger or a club he smote  
 From far away, by a control remote.

## 18

His horse was not a fiction, but instead  
 The offspring of a griffin and a mare.  
 Its plumage, forefeet, muzzle, wings and head  
 Like those of its paternal parent were.  
 The rest was from its dam inherited.  
 It's called a hippogriff. Such beasts, though rare,  
 In the Rhiphaean mountains, far beyond  
 The icy waters of the north, are found.

## 19

By magic arts he brought it to the West.  
 Then with determination and insistence  
 He straightway set himself to train the beast.  
 Within a month, by patience and persistence,  
 He reined and saddled it. At his behest  
 It bore him now without the least resistance  
 On earth and in the air - no magic creature,  
 But real and true, a prodigy of Nature.

## 20

The rest of the magician's stock-in-trade,  
 Unlike the horse, was supernatural.  
 This mattered little to the valiant Maid.  
 The ring, she knew, made her invulnerable.  
 She flashed a cut or two with her good blade  
 And put her charger through its paces. All  
 Her feints and thrusts she tried as though she fought,  
 Obeying the instructions she was taught.

## 21

When on her charger she had exercised,  
 The Maid decided to perform, dismounted,  
 The actions her instructress had advised.  
 On all his arts the necromancer counted,  
 But above all the magic shield he prized,  
 Whose piercing ray had never disappointed.  
 Thus, of its efficacy being certain,  
 From its bright surface he removed the curtain.

## 22

He could straightway have used it on his foe,  
 But he preferred to hold a knight at bay,  
 Taking a cruel pleasure in a show  
 Of swordsmanship and skilful lance-display,  
 As a sly cat, deliberately slow,  
 When he has caught a mouse will sometimes play;  
 Then, when he wills and only when he wills it,  
 He makes a sudden pounce on it and kills it.

## 23

The knight the mouse, the sorcerer the cat  
 Resembled in such contests hitherto;  
 But now the case was altered, tit for tat,  
 As valiant Bradamante nearer drew.  
 Alert, she watched his every move, so that  
 No vantage he should gain, and when she knew  
 That he intended to expose the shield,  
 She shut her eyes and lay stretched on the field.

24

The shining metal had not injured her  
 As it had injured others who preceded.  
 Her plan had been to make the sorcerer  
 Dismount and in that purpose she succeeded.  
 As soon as she lay down, the hoverer,  
 Urging his mount as quickly as was needed,  
 With a yet swifter fluttering of wings  
 Swooped down to earth in widely-spreading rings.

25

The shield appending to his saddle-bows,  
 Which in its silken covering he hid,  
 To the recumbent Maid on foot he goes.  
 She, like a wolf in ambush for a kid,  
 Awaits him and, as soon as he is close,  
 Leaps up and grasps him in a single bid  
 To overpower him. The wretch, alas!  
 Has left his book of magic on the grass.

26

With his own chain the valiant Maid belayed him,  
 Which round his waist the necromancer wore.  
 She thought no less a fetter would have stayed him  
 (And often he had used it thus before).  
 Already helpless on the ground she'd laid him  
 And quite inert all this affront he bore.  
 I cannot blame him, helpless, weak and old,  
 No match for Bradamante, strong and bold.

27

Planning to cut off the magician's head,  
 Triumphantly she lifted her right arm;  
 But when she saw his face, all rage she shed.  
 A poor revenge it seemed to do him harm.  
 No worthy foe she had undone, instead  
 A sad, old man who trembled with alarm;  
 White-haired and wrinkled, in his helplessness  
 Three score and ten he seemed, or little less.

28

'For God's sake, take my life, young man!' he cried,  
 In accents both of anger and despair.  
 Yet, gladly as the old man would have died,  
 The valiant Maid was loath to grant his prayer.  
 First, on these points she would be satisfied:  
 Who was he? And this castle in the air,  
 Why had he built it in so wild a place?  
 Why did he prey thus on the human race?

29

'With excellent intentions, woe is me!',  
 The aged necromancer, weeping, said,  
 'I built my stronghold yonder, as you see.  
 Not for my own advantage am I led  
 To rapine, but to save from jeopardy  
 A gentle knight, for in the stars I read  
 That by a traitor's hand he'll meet his death  
 Ere long, converted to the Christian faith.

30

'The sun, gazing on both the hemispheres,  
 Sees nowhere else so beautiful a youth.  
 Ruggiero is his name. From tenderest years  
 I nurtured him; now Fate, harsh and uncouth,  
 And thirst for glory bring him where he nears  
 Disaster, serving Agramant. In truth  
 I love him more than if he were my son.  
 All that I do, I do for him alone.

31

'I built the fortress with one aim in view -  
 To keep Ruggiero safe. I captured him,  
 Just as today I planned to capture you.  
 I also caught, to please his every whim,  
 Brave cavaliers and ladies, not a few,  
 And men-at-arms, stalwart and strong of limb,  
 That, though he is deprived of liberty,  
 He might find solace in their company.



32

'That they may stay contentedly confined,  
I make their every need my sole concern.  
From every quarter, joys of every kind:  
Games, music, clothing, food, at every turn.  
All pleasures, all amusements you will find  
For which the lips can ask, the heart can yearn.  
The seed I sowed was yielding a fine crop,  
But now to all my plans you put a stop.

33

'But, if your heart does not your face belie,  
Do not divert my purpose from its course.  
Accept my magic shield, a gift which I,  
Atlante, make to you; take my swift horse  
And leave my castle; if you must deny  
Me this request, then take without remorse  
One or two captives, or take all you meet,  
But leave me my Ruggiero, I entreat.

34

'But if to grant this favour you refuse,  
Before you take him back to France, I pray,  
My soul from its involucre set loose  
Wherein it dwells in squalor and decay.'  
The valiant Maid thus answered him: 'I choose  
To free Ruggiero; nothing you can say  
Will alter my resolve. Your shield and horse  
I take as mine by right, no longer yours.

35

'But even were they yours to give and take,  
It seems to me they would be poor exchange.  
You say you hold Ruggiero for his sake,  
To save him from his evil stars. How strange!  
Either the heavens' portent you mistake,  
Else, though you clearly see, you cannot change  
His fate. You cannot now foretell your own!  
How can another's doom to you be known?

36

'I will not kill you. Vain are all your pleas.  
If no one will oblige, the fatal blow  
(If you still long to meet with your decease)  
You can inflict upon yourself. Now go,  
And first, ere your own spirit you release,  
Open the doors of all your prisons.' So  
The Maid commanded, urging as she spoke  
The captive sorcerer towards the rock.

37

So, bound with his own chain, Atlante went,  
With the bold warrior-maiden at his back.  
She did not trust him, nor did she relent,  
Being not convinced by his apparent lack  
Of guile. Not far along the gradient  
They climbed before they found a hidden crack,  
Whence massive stairways spiralled to the top  
And to the castle threshold led them up.

38

The necromancer here removes a block,  
Inscribed with cabbalistic signs. Below  
Are vases which continuously smoke,  
Containing hidden fires. With a fell blow  
The enchanter breaks them. At this magic stroke  
The hill grows desolate and bleak, and lo!  
The walls are gone, nowhere a tower is seen,  
As if the edifice had never been.

39

The sorcerer that instant from his chain  
Escaped, as from a net a thrush will do.  
He and his castle went from the terrain  
At the same moment, setting free anew  
The knights and ladies; some of these (I mean  
The ladies) from superb apartments to  
The countryside transferred, in no small measure  
Were disappointed by such loss of pleasure.



40

Gradasso there is seen, and Sacripante,  
 Prasildo also, the brave cavalier  
 Who with Rinaldo, when from the Levant he  
 Came, had journeyed; Iroldo, too, his peer;  
 And finally the lovely Bradamante  
 Finds her Ruggiero whom she holds so dear.  
 As soon as he is certain it is she,  
 He rides to welcome her most joyfully.

41

More than his eyes Ruggiero loved her - nay,  
 More than the life-blood of his very heart.  
 Long he had sought her ever since the day,  
 Glimpsing her golden hair, he knew love's smart.  
 And how she then sought him, 'twere long to say.  
 Through the dark forest, wandering apart,  
 They yearned to find each other, but in vain.  
 And now they have their hearts' desire again.

42

So when at last he sees her and he knows  
 That it is she alone who freed him, then  
 His heart with joy and gladness overflows.  
 Calling himself most fortunate of men,  
 Along the valley with the Maid he goes,  
 Where she achieved her recent triumph when  
 She overcame Atlante. In the field  
 They find the hippogriff, bearing the shield.

43

Moving towards it, Bradamante tries  
 To seize the rein; when almost near enough  
 She has approached, it spreads its wings and flies,  
 And lands upon a hillside not far off.  
 She follows it. Again, to her surprise,  
 It moves away on to another bluff,  
 Just as a crow will lead a dog a dance,  
 Now here, now there, and always in advance.

44

Gradasso, Sacripante, all that band  
 Of knights who with Ruggiero came below,  
 Scattered about the terrain, took their stand,  
 Some on the highest points, some on the low,  
 Wherever each foresaw the horse might land.  
 It leads them a wild goose chase to and fro,  
 Down in the valleys, up the mountain-tops.  
 At last, near where Ruggiero waits, it stops.

45

This is the secret work of the magician,  
 Who has not yet renounced his cherished scheme  
 Of rescuing Ruggiero. This ambition  
 Fills all his thoughts and every waking dream.  
 It's he who moves the horse to this position,  
 That out of Europe it may fly with him.  
 Ruggiero reaches out to take the bridle,  
 Meaning to lead it, but that thought is idle.

46

So from Frontino he at first dismounts  
 (For such the name is of Ruggiero's horse),  
 Then to the other creature's saddle mounts  
 And, to encourage it, applies the spurs.  
 It canters for a while, then all at once  
 It takes the air and lighter far it soars  
 Than a gerfalcon rises when the hood  
 Is lifted, as the falconer thinks good.

47

The Maid, seeing Ruggiero on the steed  
 In mortal peril and so high above,  
 By this event is horror-struck indeed.  
 For a long time she cannot speak or move,  
 And all that she has heard of Ganymede,  
 Snatched up to heaven by the will of Jove,  
 She has no doubt Ruggiero's fate will be,  
 For just as fair as Ganymede is he.

48

She follows him, her steadfast gaze on high.  
 As far as she can see, she looks her fill;  
 And when he disappears, in her mind's eye  
 The valiant Maid pursues his image still.  
 Her tears, her groans, her deep despair deny  
 All solace and relief, weep as she will.  
 Then, since she can no longer see Ruggier,  
 She turns her glance upon his destrier.

49

And she resolves that she will not abandon it,  
 But take it with her, hoping by and by  
 To see its master. With her gentle hand on it,  
 She leads it off. Ruggiero from the sky  
 Looks down upon the earth but cannot land on it.  
 His mount flies on and carries him so high,  
 And every peak recedes from view so far,  
 He cannot see where plains or mountains are.

50

He soars so far, he seems the merest dot  
 To anyone who views him from the ground.  
 The hippogriff then heads towards a spot  
 Whereon the sun, when with the Crab it's found,  
 Beats vertically, mercilessly hot.  
 It wings its way as smoothly as a sound  
 Sea-going vessel speeding on its route.  
 But let us leave him sailing through the skies,  
 And to Rinaldo once more turn our eyes.

51

Each day Rinaldo's ship ahead had gone,  
 Though pressed by winds and tossed by tumbling sea,  
 Now westward and now northward whirled and spun.  
 All day and night the gale blew ceaselessly.  
 At last the Scottish coast they draw upon,  
 Where Caledonia's forest they can see,  
 Where oftentimes amidst the ancient oaks  
 Is heard the clash of war and steel-edged strokes.

52

For there the cavaliers of Britain roam,  
 Valiant in arms, with knights of other lands,  
 Some from near by, and others far from home:  
 Norwegian, Frankish and Germanic bands.  
 Valour is needed by all those who come,  
 For here a knight his death, not glory, stands  
 To find; here Tristan, Galahad, Gawain,  
 Lancelot, Galasso, Arthur foes have slain.

53

And many a brave knight of both the old  
 And new Round Table here renown has won,  
 As many a monument to many a bold,  
 Brave deed, and many trophies have made known.  
 Taking his horse and weapons from the hold,  
 Rinaldo gallops inland and is gone,  
 Commanding first the pilot to make speed  
 And wait for him at Berwick-upon-Tweed.

54

Having no company, nor squire to bear  
 His shield, alone he travelled through the wood,  
 Seeking adventure, turning here and there,  
 First to the left, then right, as he thought good.  
 On the first day he reached an abbey where  
 Largesse by the kind cenobites in food  
 And shelter in their fair apartments paid is  
 To any passing cavaliers or ladies.

55

The abbot and the monks do all they can  
 To make Rinaldo welcome; he enquires  
 (But not till he restores his inner man  
 With all the tasty viands he desires)  
 If any enterprises, such as an  
 Adventurous young knight always requires,  
 Are to be found, whence risking death or worse,  
 He stands to earn renown or the reverse.

56

They said that in the forest thereabout  
 There was no lack of strange adventurings,  
 But often, left in darkness and in doubt,  
 The monks heard little of such happenings.  
 'Try, therefore,' they advised him, 'to seek out  
 An enterprise which fame and honour brings,  
 So that brave deeds of valour are not lost,  
 But glory is made known and all its cost.

57

'If you would put your valour to the test,  
 There is a worthy deed awaiting you,  
 The noblest task that ever knight addressed,  
 Whether in ancient times or in the new:  
 The daughter of our monarch is oppressed.  
 In need of help, she knows not what to do.  
 An evil lord, Lurcanio by name,  
 Intends that she shall die a death of shame.

58

'Lurcanio has reported to the king  
 (Inspired perhaps by hatred more than right)  
 That by a secret rope he saw her bring  
 Her lover to her balcony at night.  
 By law she is condemned for such a thing  
 To death by burning. Such, then, is her plight,  
 Unless within a month – and time is short –  
 A knight arrives to challenge this report.

59

'The law of Scotland, harsh, severe, unjust,  
 Decrees that every woman who in love  
 Bestows herself (except in marriage) must  
 Be put to death, quite irrespective of  
 Her rank, if she is thus accused of lust;  
 And the dread sentence no appeal can move,  
 Unless a knight will come to her defence  
 And boldly champion her innocence.

60

'The father of Ginevra, in his woe,  
 (For such the name is of the fair princess)  
 Has sent this proclamation high and low:  
 Whoever rescues her from her distress  
 And gives to calumny a mortal blow,  
 If he is nobly born, may claim, no less,  
 Ginevra as his bride, with such estate  
 As for her dowry is appropriate.

61

'But if within a month no one has come,  
 Or, having come, is vanquished, she must die.  
 This enterprise far better will become  
 You than all random venturing. Thereby  
 Not only fame and honour, but the plum  
 Of prizes you may win, than whom the eye  
 Of Phoebus none more lovely ever sees,  
 From Indus to the straits of Hercules.

62

'Wealth also will be yours and a domain  
 Where you will live content your whole life through,  
 And the king's favour, if but once again  
 His honour's reinstated thanks to you.  
 The laws of chivalry a knight constrain  
 To avenge the honour of a lady who  
 Is held by all who know her well to be  
 The very paragon of chastity.'

63

Rinaldo thought a while and then he said:  
 'A damsel is condemned to death because  
 She gave her lover solace in her bed  
 Who with desire for her tormented was?  
 A curse upon the legislator's head!  
 And cursed be all who tolerate such laws!  
 Death rather to such damsels as refuse,  
 But not to her who loves and life renews.

64

'And in my view it makes no difference  
If the report is false or if it's true,  
For this does not affect her innocence  
(I'd praise her anyway, if no one knew).  
I know just what to say in her defence.  
So now a trusty guide I ask of you  
To lead me to the accuser. I'll not waver,  
For, as God is my help, I hope to save her.

65

'I will not say she did not do this deed.  
Lest I am wrong, it would be ill-advised;  
But I will say that even if she did,  
She does not merit to be thus chastised.  
And I will say that mad and bad indeed  
He was who first this evil law devised,  
Which from the statute-book should be erased  
And by a wiser measure be replaced.

66

'If the same ardour, if an equal fire  
Draws and compels two people ever more  
To the sweet consummation of desire  
(Which many ignoramuses deplore),  
Why should a woman by a fate so dire  
Be punished who has done what men a score  
Of times will do and never will be blamed,  
Nay, rather, will be praised for it and famed?

67

'This inequality in law much wrong  
Has done to women. With God's help, I mean  
To show that to have suffered it so long  
The greatest of iniquities has been.'  
Rinaldo's logic carried them along.  
The ancient forefathers were justly seen  
To be unjust to have consented to it;  
Also the king, who could and should undo it.

68

When next the white and crimson light of day  
Dispersed the darkness from our hemisphere,  
Rinaldo took his weapons and away  
He rode, having this time a squire to bear  
His arms and to escort him on his way  
Through miles and miles of forest, wild and drear,  
Towards the city where a damsel's life  
Hangs on the outcome of ordeal and strife.

69

Hoping to find a shorter route, they chose  
A path which from the main direction veered,  
And all at once a piteous cry arose,  
Filling the wood with echoes sad and weird.  
They spurred their destriers without repose  
Until they reached the valley whence they heard  
The sound come forth. There, in the custody  
Of two rough villains, a fair maid they see.

70

And she was weeping, more than any maid  
Or woman ever wept, or any ever could.  
The ruffians at her side, with naked blade,  
Prepared to stain the meadow with her blood,  
And she was pleading with them, to evade  
The cruel moment, hoping that they would  
Relent. Rinaldo came and, at this sight,  
Rode with loud threats to save her from her plight.

71

The ruffians, seeing help was imminent,  
Fled down the vale and hid themselves in fear.  
Scorning to follow them, Rinaldo went  
Towards the lady, curious to hear  
For what misconduct to such punishment  
She was condemned; and as his squire draws near,  
To lose no time, he bids him now take up  
The lady pillion on his horse's croup.

72

And when their former path once more they find,  
 He looks at her more closely and can see  
 How fair she is, how gracious and refined,  
 Although much frightened by the danger she  
 Has just escaped; and when some calm of mind  
 She has regained, how did she come to be,  
 He asks, in such a pass? In a low tone  
 She answers him, as Canto Five makes known.

## CANTO V

I

No creatures on the earth, no matter whether  
 Of peaceful disposition, mild and kind,  
 Or fierce and merciless as wintry weather,  
 Are hostile to the females of their kind.  
 The she-bear and her mate in sport together,  
 The lion and the lioness, we find;  
 The she-wolf and the wolf at peace appear;  
 The heifer from the bull has naught to fear.

2

What dreadful plague, what fury of despair  
 In our tormented bosoms now holds sway,  
 That wives and husbands constantly we hear  
 Wounding each other with the things they say?  
 With scratching, bruising, tearing out of hair,  
 Assault and battery, in bitter fray  
 They drench with scalding tears the marriage-bed,  
 And not tears only; sometimes blood is shed.

3

Not only a great wrong, but in God's sight  
 An outrage against Nature he commits  
 Who with his gentle helpmeet stoops to fight,  
 Or in her face a lovely woman hits,  
 Or harms a hair upon her head; but quite  
 Inhuman is the man who her throat slits,  
 Or chokes or poisons her; he, in my eyes,  
 Is not a man, but fiend in human guise.

4

Such were the evil ruffians who fled  
 Soon as Rinaldo's swift approach was seen.  
 He rescued the fair damsel whom they led  
 To the dark valley, where their plan had been  
 To draw their swords on her and kill her dead.  
 We left her talking to the paladin,  
 About to tell him what the reasons were  
 For her dire fate. I'll take the tale from there.

5

She thus began: 'I will describe to you  
 A deed more cruel and deliberate  
 Than ever Argos, Thebes, Mycenae knew,  
 Or any other place inspiring hate.  
 The sun, revolving his bright beams all through  
 The year, comes to this northern region late,  
 Being reluctant, I believe, to look  
 On such a cruel and remorseless folk.

6

'Men treat their enemies with cruelty,  
 And instances of this all ages show;  
 But to betray and kill ungratefully  
 A loyal friend is too unjust a blow.  
 That the full measure of the treachery  
 Of which I am the victim you may know,  
 Why in the very flower of my youth  
 They planned to kill me, I will tell the truth.

7

'Now, you must know, my lord, that while still young,  
 I was companion to our royal princess.  
 Together she and I grew up. Among  
 Her maids-in-waiting I had honoured place.  
 But Love unkind did me a cruel wrong.  
 So much he envied me my happiness,  
 He made the Duke of Albany appear  
 More handsome far than any cavalier.

8

'Because he seemed consumed with love for me,  
 With all my heart I loved him in return.  
 Words one can hear, the face is plain to see:  
 The inmost heart one seldom can discern.  
 Loving and trusting him, I planned that we  
 Might know the bliss for which all lovers yearn.  
 I chose, unheeding in my eagerness,  
 A chamber which belonged to the princess.

9

'She left her garments and possessions there,  
 Since often she preferred to use this room.  
 It has a balcony, to which no stair  
 Gives access, not enclosed, and jutting from  
 The wall. Love, as you know, will all things dare,  
 And so my lover many times would come  
 To climb the ladder made of rope, which I  
 Let down when in his arms I longed to lie.

10

'This opportunity I always took  
 Whenever the princess enabled me,  
 For many times that chamber she forsook,  
 The summer heat or winter cold to flee.  
 Since on that side no one could overlook  
 The palace, none our rendezvous could see;  
 And night and day nobody passes nigh  
 The houses lying derelict near by.

11

'For many months and days, joys not a few  
 We shared; in our delight, no amorous game  
 Was left untried, and, as our pleasure grew,  
 I seemed on fire with a consuming flame.  
 Blinded by love for him, I little knew  
 How much he feigned, how little, to his shame,  
 He loved me, though his sinister designs  
 Should have been evident from many signs.

12

'After some time he showed that he aspired  
To the princess's hand, and, what is more,  
I cannot tell you whether he was fired  
With this ambition after or before  
The love he feigned for me, but he acquired  
Such an ascendancy that this I bore,  
And when, unblushing, with no sense of pride,  
He asked me to assist him, I complied.

13

'He told me that his love for me was true  
And that his love for the princess was feigned.  
His sole intention was, he said, to woo  
Her as his bride, and if she then but deigned  
To look with favour on his suit, he knew  
The king would give consent, for, he explained,  
No one in all the realm in rank and blood,  
The king alone excepted, higher stood.

14

'And he convinces me that if I lend  
My help and he the monarch's son-in-law  
Becomes (no one, if he achieved this end,  
Could rise to greater height, I plainly saw),  
I can rely on him as on a friend.  
In all his arguments there seemed no flaw  
And he persuaded me that all his life  
He'd give to me the love he owed a wife.

15

'My every wish and thought was for his sake,  
And no desire of his could I gainsay.  
In everything which my dear love would make  
Contented, there my own contentment lay.  
Thus every opportunity I take  
To praise him and extol in every way  
His virtues to Ginevra so that she  
To love my love may be induced by me.

[v]

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16

'With all my heart and soul I did and said  
All that was possible, as in Heaven above  
God is my witness, yet no progress made  
In the design to make the princess love  
My duke, whom I so greatly praised. Instead,  
With her whole heart she was enamoured of  
A noble, handsome, courteous cavalier,  
Who from a distant land had travelled here.

17

'As a young boy, accompanied by his brother,  
He came from Italy with us to dwell.  
In all of Britain there was not another  
To rival him in feats of arms or skill.  
Our king esteemed and loved him as no other,  
And, by endowing him, as was his will,  
With castles, villas, fiefs and all such gifts,  
The knight to a baronial rank uplifts.

18

'If the king found him pleasing, the princess,  
Responding to the valour of the knight,  
Named Ariodante, is drawn to him no less,  
Nay more, for well she knew him to requite  
Her love and that his heart with an excess  
Of ardour burned for her, with flames more bright  
Than Etna, Mount Vesuvius or Troy did  
When by their strategem the Greeks destroyed it.

19

'The love she bore him with a heart sincere,  
The perfect faith to which her soul inclined,  
Made the princess reluctant to lend ear  
To praises of the duke. Her steadfast mind  
I could not change. The more I persevere,  
Pleading with her to look on him with kind  
Compassion, she, but scorning him the more,  
Towards him grows more hostile than before.



‘I deemed it best my lover should refrain  
 (And many, many times I said as much)  
 From an endeavour which I saw was vain,  
 There was no hope that he would ever touch  
 Her heart; as I repeatedly explain,  
 Her burning love for Ariodant is such,  
 If all the waters of the ocean drenched  
 That flame, no single spark of it were quenched.

21

‘The duke, whose name is Polinesso, when  
 He heard my full account and understood,  
 And with his very eyes had plainly seen  
 In this vain enterprise how matters stood,  
 At last concluded that his love had been  
 Disdained, that by another she was wooed,  
 Whom she preferred. With injured pride he burned  
 And all his love to hate and anger turned.

22

‘And, planning how to bring disharmony  
 Between Ginevra and her love, he schemes  
 An irremediable enmity  
 Which shall for ever cancel all their dreams:  
 By his intrigue, of gross unchastity  
 (Though innocent) Ginevra guilty seems.  
 He made me party to his fell design,  
 Nor did he look for other help than mine.

23

‘His plan being formed, “Dalinda dear, you know”  
 (For that’s my name), the duke, my lover, said,  
 “How from its root a sturdy tree will grow,  
 However many times the axe is laid:  
 So my ill-starred enamourment, although  
 By evil chance impeded and gainsaid,  
 Still burgeons with new longing and desire  
 And for fulfilment ever I aspire.

24

“‘Yet not so much for pleasure, I confess,  
 I long for her, as to obtain my way.  
 So, if Ginevra I may not possess,  
 I’ll bring imagination into play.  
 I want you to observe when the princess  
 Retires to rest; when she has cast away  
 Her garments and lies naked in her bed,  
 Seize them and put them on yourself instead.

25

““Notice her ornaments and style of hair,  
 And, taking every detail in your scope,  
 All her appearance imitate with care.  
 Then from the balcony let down the rope,  
 Which I, pretending to be unaware  
 Of your disguise, will climb, for thus I hope  
 By self-deception to assuage my pain  
 And from my longing some relief to gain.”

26

‘These were his words; and I, my wits dispersed,  
 My mind and heart distraught, did not perceive  
 In all the strategy he thus rehearsed  
 The obvious deceit he planned to weave.  
 So, putting on Ginevra’s clothing first,  
 Next from the balcony, where I received  
 My love, I let the hempen ladder fall.  
 Too late, the damage done, I see it all!

27

‘The duke in the meantime, as man to man,  
 To Ariodante had addressed these words  
 (Before their rivalry in love began,  
 They were good friends, nor ever had crossed swords);  
 “My lord, I am astonished that you can  
 So ill repay the love which I towards  
 All those who are my equals, as is due,  
 Have always shown, and, likewise, shown to you.

28

“For I am certain that you understand  
I’ve loved Ginevra now for many a year.  
This very day I go to ask her hand  
In marriage of the king. Though it is clear  
Your heart is fruitlessly bestowed, you stand  
As an obstruction in my way. I swear  
My chivalry would be a shade more fine  
If I were in your shoes and you in mine!”

29

“And I” (thus did bold Ariodant respond)  
“Am even more amazed. You greatly err,  
For of the fair princess my heart was fond  
Long before ever you set eyes on her.  
I know you know how ardent is the bond  
Of love between us – how our hearts concur.  
Her only longing is to be my wife.  
I know she never loved you in her life.

30

“Why do *you*, then, not show *me* the respect  
Which you, in friendship’s name, demand of me,  
Which I would show to you if, in effect,  
You were the one she loved? That she will be  
My wife, I am entitled to expect  
No less than you, although you hold in fee  
A vast estate. The king loves me no less,  
And I (not you) am loved by the princess.”

31

“Oh!” said the duke, “great error you’re committing.  
This love of yours has rendered you unstable.  
Since of the pudding proof is in the eating,  
Let us put all our cards upon the table.  
Reveal your hand. I, likewise, as is fitting,  
Will make my own as plain as I am able.  
Then he whose hand is shown to be the thinner,  
Let him declare the other man the winner.

32

“And I am ready, if you wish, I’ll swear  
To keep for ever hidden what you say  
In confidence to me, if you’ll forbear  
To make my secrets known in any way.”  
And so they both agreed in the affair  
And on the Gospel placed their hands straightway,  
Promising each to each complete discretion.  
Then Ariodante first made this confession.

33

‘He told with candour and with perfect truth  
How things between him and the princess stood,  
How in her words and letters she her troth  
Had pledged, vowing no other husband would  
She have; failing the king’s consent, her youth  
She would forgo and whosoever wooed  
Her later as his lawful wedded wife  
She would refuse and live a single life.

34

‘He further said he hoped that in reward  
For valour, many a time in battle shown,  
Which he would gladly show again, to guard  
The King of Scotland and the Scottish throne,  
He might so earn his sovereign’s regard  
That as a worthy son-in-law he’d own  
Him, and his daughter’s happiness thereby  
Secure and with her heart’s desire comply.

35

“So this is how I stand, and I believe’,  
He said, “no man can rival me or prove  
Me wrong; I’m not impatient to receive  
A more explicit token of her love,  
Being content, till we are wed, to leave  
Things as they are, as by our God above  
It is decreed. I ask no more. Her virtue  
Would anyway gainsay me if I were to.”

36

'When Ariodant his case had thus outlined  
And the reward which he looked forward to,  
The wily Polinesso, who designed  
To make his hoped-for bride appear untrue,  
Began: "When I have done, my friend, you'll find  
I'm more advanced in this affair than you.  
To make you own the justice of my claim,  
Chapter and verse I'll now proceed to name.

37

"She is deceiving you. She loves you not.  
A diet of false hopes she's feeding you,  
For, when with me, she scruples not one jot  
To mock you and your love. That this is true  
I'll prove – far more than promises I've got,  
Or the vain words you are accustomed to;  
And under pledge of secrecy I'll show  
What it were better none should ever know.

38

"I can assure you not a month goes by  
But on three nights, or four, or six, or ten,  
Naked within her loving arms I lie,  
Lost in the pleasure which relieves the pain  
Of love. With this you know you cannot vie.  
Yours are but empty tales. Surrender then,  
Or else provide some further proof. Admit  
That you have lost the contest, and retreat."

39

"I don't believe you," Ariodant retorted.  
"I know that what you tell me is untrue.  
The truth for your own ends you have distorted,  
It may be to dissuade me from my due.  
But since such calumny you have reported,  
To combat here and now I challenge you:  
You are a liar and defame my love;  
A traitor too, as I will quickly prove!"

40

"It would not be good form", the duke replied,  
"To have recourse to mortal combat where  
The evidence on which we can decide  
The issue is as plain as it is clear.  
With your own eyes it can be verified."  
An icy tremor seized the cavalier,  
And if he truly had believed this boast,  
He would straightway have given up the ghost.

41

'His face an ashy pale, his heart pierced through,  
His mouth awry as with a bitter taste,  
With trembling voice, he said: "If this is true,  
No longer my devotion will I waste,  
But give up every hope of her – to you  
So liberal, to me so cold and chaste!  
But do not think I will believe your lies,  
Unless I see it with these very eyes."

42

"I will arrange the time," the other said,  
And he departed. Scarce two nights had passed,  
I think, ere the arrangement we had made  
Should bring him to my arms. The time at last  
Had come to spring the careful trap he laid.  
And so, his rival in despair to cast,  
He bade him come that very night and hide  
Where houses long had stood unoccupied.

43

'He pointed out a dwelling, opposite  
The balcony where he was wont to climb.  
At once the other knight suspected it  
Might be an ambush where the deadly crime  
Of murder Polinesso would commit,  
Feigning the while (that he might choose his time)  
To prove concerning the princess what he  
Knew well was an impossibility.

44

'Yet he resolved to go, but in such guise  
That if the duke intended to waylay him,  
He would not let him take him by surprise,  
Nor yet succeed in the design to slay him.  
He had a valiant brother, bold and wise,  
Lurcanio by name; none could gainsay him —  
The greatest knight-at-arms of all our court —  
And as the strength of ten was his support.

45

'He went to seek his help, and bade him take  
His weapons and companion him that night.  
Not even with his brother did he break  
The vow of secrecy, as he deemed right.  
A stone's throw from himself, for safety's sake,  
He bade him stand: "If I am in dire plight,  
I'll shout, but if you care for me at all,  
Brother, I beg you, wait until I call."

46

"Lead on; rely on me," his brother said.  
So Ariodant, as bidden previously,  
Entered the house which stood, untenanted,  
Exactly opposite my balcony.  
The vile deceiver, with an eager tread,  
Approached to demonstrate the infamy  
Of the princess. He duly gives the sign,  
And still I'm unaware of his design.

47

'And so, clad in a robe of purest white,  
Adorned with golden bands about the waist,  
And on my head a golden net, bedight  
With crimson tassels, in her style and taste,  
Hearing the signal, I stepped forth to sight  
On the veranda, and myself so placed  
That from the house where Ariodant was hidden  
I could be plainly seen, as I was bidden.

48

'Lurcanio, meanwhile, remained in doubt  
And, fearful for the safety of his brother,  
Or, it may be, desiring to find out  
The cause of all the mystery and pother,  
Resolved to see what it was all about.  
So, in the dark, with stealthy steps, the other  
House he entered, coming within a yard  
Or two of Ariodant, and there stood guard.

49

'Of these manoeuvres wholly unaware,  
I stood on the veranda, in the dress  
I have described; thanks to the moonlight there,  
Which made me plainly visible, no less  
Than to the similarity I bear  
In figure and in looks to the princess,  
My face for hers being easily mistaken,  
Misgivings in her lover's breast awaken.

50

'The more so, as considerable space  
Parted the balcony from where he stood  
In darkness near his brother in that place;  
And thus it was that Polinesso could  
Deceive the wretched lover, whose sad case  
May be imagined and well understood.  
Then Polinesso up the ladder climbs,  
As he has done before so many times.

51

'And straight away, as my fond custom is,  
I throw my arms about my lover's neck.  
His mouth, his face, repeatedly I kiss.  
He, in response, his ardour does not check.  
Every caress intensifies our bliss.  
Dejected, Ariodante sees the wreck  
Of all his dearest hopes, as he believes,  
And bitter disillusionment receives.

52

'His sorrow is so great that he decides  
To take his life; and on the ground his sword,  
Its pommel downwards, sets, that his insides  
Upon its point the better may be gored.  
Lurcanio, amazed, with mighty strides,  
Having this fell design observed, toward  
His brother leapt. He'd seen the duke's ascent,  
But knew not who we were, nor what it meant.

53

'And he forbade him thus to immolate  
Himself. (If he had moved more slowly or  
Stood farther off, he would have been too late.)  
"Brother," he cried, "Why do you thus abhor  
Yourself? What has reduced you to this state?  
Have you quite lost the wits you had of yore?  
You let a woman drive you to your death?"  
All this he shouted in a single breath.

54

"Perish all women! And this faithless jade,  
In whom you put your trust, deserves to die.  
As once you loved her, do not be afraid  
To hate her. For the sake of honour, try  
Some worthier cause, and this your trusty blade,  
Which now you turn against yourself, put by  
To serve you when you bring this deed to light  
Before your lord, the king, in lawful fight."

55

'Seeing his brother standing there beside him,  
From his harsh plan the elder now desists,  
But, unabated, secretly inside him  
His desperate intention still persists.  
Now that he deems Ginevra's love denied him,  
He thinks no reason for his life exists,  
Yet to his brother bravely plays the part  
Of one who feels no sorrow in his heart.

56

'Next day, without a word to anyone,  
Being driven by a mortal desperation,  
His purpose even to himself unknown,  
He left for an uncertain destination.  
The riddle as to why or where he'd gone  
Became the topic of much conversation  
Among the members of the Scottish court,  
Who put forth theories of every sort.

57

'After eight days or more they saw advance  
A stranger who the princess came to find.  
He brought her tidings of her Ariodant's  
Demise: that he was drowned, not by the wind  
Capsized, nor had he perished by mischance;  
To his own death he had himself consigned.  
From a high precipice, dejected, he  
Had flung himself head first into the sea.

58

"Before he did this deed," the stranger said,  
"I met him quite by chance upon my way.  
At his request, I followed where he led.  
«I want you,» he explained to me, «to say  
To the princess, on whose account I fled,  
That what you are about to see today  
I have been driven to because I've seen  
Too much. Ah! happier if blind I'd been!»

59

"We came just then by chance to where there is,  
Opposite Ireland, a high promontory,  
And from the summit of that precipice  
He plunged, as I have said, into the sea.  
So, to fulfil that last request of his,  
I left him there and set out speedily."  
Ginevra, in dismay, turns deathly pale  
At the recital of this grievous tale.

60

'How she despaired, alas! and how she cried,  
 Soon as she gained the refuge of her bed!  
 She beat her breast, she rent her garments wide,  
 She tore her golden tresses from her head.  
 And often she repeated, mystified,  
 Those last reproachful words which he had said:  
 That he was driven by his grief to such  
 A grievous death because he'd seen too much.

61

'Through all the land there travelled the report  
 Of Ariodante's broken-hearted leap.  
 Each cavalier, each lady of the court,  
 The king himself, could scarce forbear to weep.  
 Lurcanio's sorrow was of such a sort,  
 The pain in his fraternal heart so deep,  
 To follow in his brother's steps he yearned  
 And on himself his sword he all but turned.

62

'Many a time he muttered through clenched teeth:  
 "By that intrigue of hers Ginevra drove  
 My brother from his mind and to his death,  
 Soon as he saw how faithless was her love."  
 Desire for vengeance grew with every breath.  
 Anger and grief together in him strove.  
 For king's and people's wrath he'd little care:  
 He'd bring to light the truth of the affair.

63

'Before the throne, being careful first to wait  
 Until the chamber filled with courtiers was,  
 He said, "My Lord, as you well know, my late  
 Lamented brother, disregarding laws  
 Of reason, killed himself. Of his sad fate  
 Your daughter is the one and only cause,  
 For by her conduct, faithless and unchaste,  
 His youth and life she drove him thus to waste.

64

"He loved her; and as no dishonour stained  
 His love, to tell you all is my intent.  
 By virtuous deeds his hope was to have gained  
 Her as his lawful wife, with your consent.  
 Alas! while at a distance he remained,  
 Grateful if he might sometimes breathe the scent  
 Of foliage, he saw one climb the tree  
 And pluck the longed-for fruit clandestinely."

65

'Proceeding with his tale, he then related  
 How he had seen her let the ladder down  
 To where her paramour below had waited.  
 This man's identity remained unknown.  
 He had disguised himself, Lurcanio stated,  
 With hair concealed and clothing not his own.  
 He was prepared by means of his good blade  
 To verify the truth of all he said.

66

'You can imagine then her father's grief  
 When such an accusation he has heard.  
 Not only was it passing all belief,  
 And in his breast a deep amazement stirred,  
 But well he knew and understood that if  
 In her defence no champion appeared,  
 Able to give Lurcanio the lie,  
 He must condemn the fair princess to die.

67

'I do not doubt that you have heard, kind sir,  
 Of this our law which thus condemns a maid  
 Or married woman, who in love may err  
 Or give herself outside the marriage-bed,  
 To die, unless a valiant cavalier,  
 Before a month elapses, offers aid,  
 Proving her innocent and in the teeth  
 Of her accuser saving her from death.



76

Towards St Andrew's city, where the king  
 And all his courtiers assembled were  
 To watch the singular event (a thing  
 More strange than this they'd seldom seen occur),  
 Rinaldo galloped at full speed to bring  
 Assistance in the role of challenger,  
 And on the journey, near the citadel,  
 He met a squire who had fresh news to tell.

77

A stranger had arrived to champion  
 Ginevra in her undeserved disgrace.  
 The markings on his banner were unknown,  
 Giving no hint of family or race;  
 Where'er he went, he kept his visor down,  
 Thus nobody so far had seen his face.  
 Not his own shield-bearer, who night and day  
 Attended him, his origin could say.

78

Then on they went and after riding hard  
 They saw the city walls against the sky.  
 Dalinda was afraid to pass the ward  
 But for Rinaldo put misgivings by.  
 As they approached they saw the gate was barred.  
 Rinaldo asked: 'What does this signify?'  
 He was informed that all the populace  
 Had flocked to where the combat would take place,

79

Between Lurcanio and the unknown knight,  
 Across the city, on the farther side,  
 Where on a plain they had begun to fight.  
 At Montalbano's name the gate flew wide  
 And straight away behind him was locked tight.  
 Then with Dalinda having passed inside,  
 He leaves her at an inn, as she entreats,  
 Before he gallops off through empty streets.

80

In words of comfort, bidding her adieu,  
 He promised he would soon return to her,  
 Then speedily rode off to where he knew  
 The warriors in deadly combat were.  
 Much they had given and much taken too,  
 Both the accuser and the challenger,  
 The one to prove Ginevra false intending,  
 The other knight her good repute defending.

81

Six knights attended them in the stockade.  
 They were on foot, armed only in cuirass.  
 The Duke of Albany was on parade,  
 Mounted upon a destrier; he as  
 High Constable the spectacle surveyed,  
 That no untoward event might come to pass.  
 With joy and arrogance his bosom swelled  
 When the princess in peril he beheld.

82

Between the serried ranks Rinaldo moves,  
 His good Baiardo scattering the fray;  
 For at the thunder of his mighty hooves  
 Not one for long will linger in the way.  
 In his magnificence Rinaldo proves  
 The most superb of all that vast array.  
 Before the king's pavilion he draws rein  
 And all the multitude flock round again.

83

Then to the king, Rinaldo in this guise  
 Began his plea: 'My lord, I pray, to this  
 Dread combat call a halt, Whichever dies  
 Of the two combatants will die amiss.  
 One thinks he has just cause, and yet he lies  
 Unknowingly; his that same error is  
 Which drove his brother to his tragic leap,  
 And drives him now a false revenge to reap.'



84

'The other knows not if he's wrong or right.  
To his bold heart this is of no import;  
For that which moves a noble, valiant knight  
Is beauty in distress of any sort.  
But I to innocence now bring respite;  
I bring the opposite of false report.  
For God's sake, part these combatants, I pray,  
And then lend ear to what I have to say.'

85

By his authority and noble mien  
And by his words, the monarch is impressed,  
And straightway to the Constable is seen  
To give the needed signal to desist.  
To knights and barons gathered on the green  
And all the company which round him pressed,  
Rinaldo then, withholding not one jot,  
Revealed in full the villain's evil plot.

86

And next he offers, for he has no fears,  
To prove by arms that what he says is true.  
They summon Polinesso: he appears,  
Perturbed and undecided what to do;  
And when Rinaldo his denial hears,  
He shouts: 'Let deeds decide 'twixt me and you!'  
They are both armed; all's ready for the fray,  
The combat can begin without delay.

87

Ah! how the king and all his people longed  
That the princess would be proved innocent,  
That God would clearly show she had been wronged  
By Polinesso with malign intent!  
For he was covetous of what belonged  
To others, cruel, proud and fraudulent.  
That he should perpetrate such vile deception  
Appeared in character and no exception.

88

There on the jousting-field he stands, forlorn,  
With trembling heart, his cheek an ashen grey.  
At the third blast upon the herald's horn  
He puts his lance in rest. And straight away  
Rinaldo rides headlong in mighty scorn,  
Intending with one stroke to win the day.  
His expertise is equal to the test:  
His weapon pierces his opponent's breast.

89

Fixed in his trunk, it hurls him to the ground  
Six yards at least from where his charger stands.  
Rinaldo leaves the saddle with one bound  
And of the villain's helmet slits the bands.  
Further resistance useless now is found.  
He sues for mercy at Rinaldo's hands,  
And in the hearing of the court and king  
Confesses he has done this dreadful thing.

90

He has not time to tell it all; his breath,  
His voice, his life, are all at once cut short.  
The king, seeing his daughter freed from death  
And from the infamy of ill report,  
Is overjoyed and more consoled than with  
A loss restored to him of any sort,  
Even his crown, supposing it were stolen.  
With joy and gratitude his heart is swollen.

91

And when he sees the champion remove  
His helmet, and Rinaldo stands revealed  
(Knowing him as the son of Aymon of  
Great valour), he gives thanks that such a shield  
As this his daughter's innocence should prove;  
Then turns to him whose face is still concealed,  
That knight, unknown, who, in Ginevra's aid,  
Challenged Lurcanio with lance and blade.

92

Requested by the king to tell his name,  
 Or let at least his countenance be seen,  
 That he may be rewarded, as became  
 A knight who so courageously had been  
 Inspired with such a noble, gallant aim,  
 He moves into the centre of the scene  
 And there at last reveals what I'll make clear  
 If my next canto you are pleased to hear.

## CANTO VI

1

Doomed is the wretch who thinks that he can hide  
 All traces of the crime he has committed,  
 For if all else is dumb, it will be cried  
 Upon the air or from the depths emitted;  
 And God Himself events will sometimes guide  
 So that the sinner by the sin's outwitted,  
 And inadvertently, without being asked,  
 He gives himself away and is unmasked.

2

That malefactor, Polinesso, thought  
 He'd covered every vestige of his crime;  
 And of his one accomplice he had sought  
 To rid himself for ever in good time.  
 The second subterfuge it was which brought  
 To pass the sequel which defeated him.  
 This might have been avoided, but he spurred  
 Too eagerly and, thus, his death incurred.

3

Friends, dukedom, life he lost, at one fell blow,  
 And, what is worse, he died in dire disgrace.  
 Now, as I said, they cannot wait to know  
 Who the strange knight may be, whom none can place.  
 At last he pulls his helmet off, to show,  
 To everyone's surprise, the well-loved face  
 Of Ariodante, mourned by every Scot  
 Who heard the story of his tragic lot,

44

'If drowning was a death too easy for me  
To satisfy in full your cruel taste,  
Despatch some savage creature to devour me:  
I'll not resist, if only it make haste;  
Or any other fate to overpower me -  
I'll thank you if I die of it at least.'  
These were the words the wretched damsel cried,  
When suddenly the hermit's at her side.

45

From a high cliff meanwhile he had surveyed  
Angelica far down upon the shore,  
Whom towering rocks and beetling crags dismayed.  
He had arrived about six days before,  
By demons through untrodden paths conveyed.  
He now approached: a pious air he wore,  
More sanctimonious than any saint's  
Imaged in marble or in artist's paints.

46

Becoming then aware of him, she took,  
Not knowing who he was, some comfort; and,  
Although still wan and pallid was her look,  
Her fears diminished; when he took his stand  
Beside her, all precaution she forsook,  
And said: 'Father, behold on what a strand  
I am marooned; help me, I beg of you',  
And told him, sobbing, what full well he knew.

47

The hermit to console her first essays  
With pious arguments, and while he speaks  
His sacrilegious hands begins to place  
Now on her bosom, now upon her cheeks,  
Then, growing bolder, ventures an embrace.  
Affronted, to discourage him she seeks,  
And with one hand she strikes at him and pushes,  
Her countenance suffused with modest blushes.

48

Then from a pocket in his robe, full-skirted,  
He drew a bottle, full of magic juice;  
And in those orbs whose beams, by Love converted,  
So powerful a radiance produce,  
A single droplet of this potion squirted,  
Enough a heavy slumber to induce.  
Angelica at once it stupefies  
And on the sand a prey to lust she lies.

49

And, as defenceless in his arms she rests,  
Embracing her, he touches her all over,  
Kisses her mouth and both her lovely breasts.  
The rough and lonely place gives perfect cover,  
But in this joust his weary jade resists.  
For all he longs to prove himself a lover,  
Years having undermined his aptitude,  
The more he strives, the less he can make good.

50

Whatever methods he experiments,  
His lazy courser simply will not jump;  
Nor will it lift its head in consequence  
Of any jerking rein, or spur, or thump.  
To sleep beside her, then, is less expense.  
But Fortune will not leave him there to slump  
In such inertia; having ill begun with him,  
She schemes, as is her wont, to have more fun with him.

51

Before continuing, I think it best  
To tell you what had happened in the seas  
Of the far distant North, towards the West,  
Beyond Ireland, among the Hebrides.  
Now of inhabitants, the emptiest  
An island named Ebuda is of these,  
For vengeful Proteus there resolved to keep  
The orc and other monsters of the deep.

52

The earliest historians aver  
 (I know not if there's truth in what they say)  
 That once a mighty king was monarch there.  
 His daughter, beautiful in every way,  
 Inspired in Proteus' breast such love for her  
 That in the sea itself he burned; one day,  
 When, sporting on the shore, her maids escaped her,  
 (Thus unattended leaving her) he raped her.

53

This was a grievous and a tragic thing,  
 For in her womb she bore the sea-god's child.  
 No plea for mercy could placate the king,  
 Whose nature was the opposite of mild.  
 No stay of justice, no remonstrating  
 Would he permit; and so she died, reviled.  
 His grandson, too, as sinless as the morn,  
 Was put to death before he had been born.

54

When Proteus, shepherd of that awesome flock  
 Which Neptune, ruler of the sea, commands,  
 Hears how his love has died upon the block,  
 He in his rage all treaties countermands,  
 And, letting loose his hordes to run amok  
 Upon Ebuda's shores, he, gloating, stands  
 To watch them savage oxen, horses, sheep,  
 And everywhere ferocious harvest reap.

55

And even to the city gates they swarmed,  
 Destroying every living thing they found.  
 On guard both day and night, the people, armed,  
 Endeavoured all in vain to hold their ground.  
 Farms were deserted, everyone alarmed.  
 At last, despairing, they resolved to sound  
 The oracle, which, asked for its advice,  
 Gave them these words of counsel in a trice:

56

A damsel they must choose, as beauteous  
 As she whom sorrow to the scaffold bore;  
 And, to console the outraged Protæus,  
 Present her in exchange upon the shore.  
 If he accepted her, then plenteous  
 Their recompense would be, for he no more  
 Would trouble them; but if he's not content,  
 More damsels, one by one, they must present.

57

And so began the awesome destiny  
 Of all the maidens in the neighbourhood.  
 Each day to waiting Proteus, by the sea,  
 A damsel's offered, but in cruel mood  
 He spurns them all and passes them with glee  
 To the fierce orc which gulps them down as food.  
 This one remained beside the river-mouth  
 When all the other monsters drifted south.

58

Such is the history that I have read,  
 But whether true or false I cannot say.  
 Thus by Ebudans is interpreted  
 The cruel custom whereby every day  
 A monstrous orc on woman's flesh is fed,  
 To which the islanders this tribute pay;  
 Thus, though a woman's life is everywhere  
 A burden, it's intolerable there.

59

O wretched maidens whom the Fates transport  
 To that fell shore where people lie in wait  
 To catch you for the cruel monster's sport!  
 Of victims from abroad the score is great,  
 Yet always there are more to come to port,  
 To furnish for the orc a living bait;  
 And if the winds that way should fail to blow,  
 The cunning hunters seek them high and low.

## 60

In galleys, privateers, or any boat  
 The coastal waters eagerly they scour,  
 Seeking provisions for the monster's throat;  
 And many lovely women captured are  
 By whatsoever means success promote:  
 Force, flattery, or gold; from near and far,  
 From here, from there, from everywhere they bring them,  
 And into prisons, dungeons, towers fling them.

## 61

One of their evil galleys chanced to pass,  
 Hugging the desolate and lonely strand,  
 Where, among brakes and briars, on the grass,  
 The hermit's victim lay, as he had planned.  
 Hoping to find fresh water and amass  
 Timber for kindling, rowers put to land  
 And saw, clasped in the holy father's arms,  
 The flower of all female grace and charms.

## 62

O tender spoil, too exquisite and rare,  
 Too precious for these rough barbarians!  
 O cruel Fortune, who could be aware  
 That, ruling us with such insouciance,  
 You'd offer as an avid monster's fare  
 That peerless beauty which at Agrican's  
 Command the Tartars from Caucasia  
 Came forth to capture once in India?

## 63

That peerless beauty which before his sword  
 And all his kingdom Sacripante placed,  
 That peerless beauty which Anglante's lord  
 Unhinges and his honour has defaced,  
 That peerless beauty which with one accord  
 The East has championed against the West,  
 Is left alone with no one to befriend it,  
 And not a word is uttered to defend it.

## 64

The fair Angelica, in her deep swoon,  
 Is bound and chained before she can awaken,  
 And, likewise, to the dismal vessel, strewn  
 With wailing prisoners, the hermit's taken.  
 To the dread island making headway soon,  
 As from the mast the sail once more is shaken,  
 They reach the fortress where the victims wait  
 Until their turn arrives to meet their fate.

## 65

Because so lovely are her form and face  
 That in her captors sympathy they stir,  
 Rousing compassion in that savage race,  
 Her day of doom they constantly defer  
 By putting other women in her place.  
 They hope the time will never come for her;  
 But to the monster she is led at last,  
 And people weep to see her going past.

## 66

Who can describe her tears, her sobs, her cries,  
 The pleas she utters on each wailing breath,  
 Her lamentation reaching to the skies?  
 It is a miracle the shore beneath  
 Does not divide, as on the rock she lies,  
 Chained, helpless, waiting for a hideous death.  
 Not I, indeed, who am so grieved, I swear,  
 That I must move my narrative elsewhere,

## 67

Hoping to make my verses less lugubrious,  
 Until my weary spirit has revived.  
 No snakes dwelling in regions insalubrious,  
 No tigress of her progeny deprived,  
 No desert reptile, venomous, opprobrious,  
 'Twixt Red Sea shores and Atlas ever lived  
 Which could without compassion contemplate  
 The beautiful Angelica's dire fate.

68

Ah, if the Count Orlando only knew  
 The plight of her for whom he sought in Paris!  
 Or if the tidings reached the other two  
 Whose understanding from the truth so far is!  
 Risking a thousand deaths, they would pursue  
 A noble course, more chivalrous than war is;  
 But if a message came, how then could they  
 Their lady rescue who's so far away?

69

Meanwhile in Paris, King Troiano's son  
 The citadel besieges with success.  
 (In all the world his prowess is well known.)  
 To dire extremity reduced, no less,  
 The Christians now appear to be undone.  
 But Heaven hears their prayers and in redress  
 Sends down the rain; else to the pagan lance  
 The Empire had surrendered, and fair France.

70

For God to Charles's just lament paid heed  
 And from the conflagration's raging threat  
 The Christians by a sudden downpour freed.  
 (The flames might otherwise be burning yet.)  
 Wise is the man who turns to God in need.  
 Where else will he find help when he's beset?  
 This miracle for Charles, who is devout,  
 Was aid divinely sent, he has no doubt.

71

Orlando that same night lies wide awake,  
 His thoughts, distracted, rambling here, now there.  
 He tries to concentrate but cannot make  
 His troubled conscience settle anywhere,  
 As on the crystal surface of a lake  
 The trembling shafts of sunlight mirrored are,  
 Leaping to roof-top, and, at random glancing,  
 Sparkle and gleam, in all directions dancing.

72

And to his anguished mind his love returns.  
 Though never absent, now while he's at rest  
 She kindles him anew and brighter burns  
 The flame which seemed by day to have quiesced.  
 Over and over in his thoughts he churns  
 How he had travelled with her to the West  
 As far as from Cathay, how at Bordeaux  
 He lost her and now seeks her high and low.

73

His conduct he repented grievously  
 And often he reproached himself in vain.  
 'My love,' he said, 'how reprehensively  
 I have behaved towards you! To think (what pain!)  
 I might have had you night and day with me  
 (If my devotion you did not disdain),  
 But into Namor's hands instead I gave you,  
 Not knowing from such outrage how to save you.

74

'Had I not reason to oppose this course?  
 And Charles perhaps would not have said me nay.  
 And who against me would have dared use force,  
 Or who by violence take you away?  
 And ought not I to arms have had recourse,  
 My breast presenting to the bitter fray?  
 In the event, not Charles with all his might  
 Could have despoiled me of you in fair fight.

75

'Would he had placed her in another's care,  
 In Paris, or some citadel well guarded!  
 To Namor he entrusted her, aware  
 That she'd escape and would not be awarded  
 To me as guerdon. No one anywhere  
 Deserved her more, yet I'm thus ill-rewarded.  
 I'd have protected her; ah, how I rue  
 That what I could have done I did not do!



76

'O my sweet life, where are you now, alone,  
Far from my help, so lovely and so young,  
Like a lost lamb which, when the day is flown,  
Meanders in a wood, in hopes ere long  
The shepherd will locate her bleating tone;  
But from afar the wolf has heard among  
The plains her voice uplifted in the night,  
And all in vain the shepherd mourns her plight.

77

'My hope, where are you now, where can you be?  
Alone you wander yet on ways untracked?  
Or did the wolves destroy you cruelly  
When your Orlando's faithful arm you lacked?  
And that sweet flower, the height of bliss, ah me!  
Which scrupulously I preserved intact,  
Lest I offend a maidenhood so chaste,  
By force has now been taken and laid waste?

78

'Alas! what do I long for but to die,  
If men have robbed me of that sweetest bliss?  
Send down on me, I pray, O God on high,  
All other sufferings, but spare me this!  
If it be true, I'll end my life with my  
Own hands and send my soul to the Abyss.'  
Such were the words Orlando uttered, sighing  
And weeping, restless on his pallet lying.

79

All creatures on the earth to rest their bones,  
Or to refresh their souls, now took their ease,  
Some on soft beds and others on hard stones,  
Some on the grass, still others in the trees;  
But you, Orlando, amid tears and groans,  
Your eyelids scarce have closed to gain release.  
Those irksome, goading thoughts give no respite,  
Not in your sleep, so fitful and so light.

80

In broken slumber thus Orlando dreams:  
Upon a bank where flowers his soul refresh,  
He gazes upon ivory which seems  
By Nature tinted to resemble flesh,  
And on two radiant stars, of which the beams  
Serve to revive the soul which they enmesh:  
I mean her eyes and face (as you have guessed),  
By which his heart is riven from his breast.

81

He felt the greatest happiness and joy  
That ever a requited lover knew;  
When there arose a tempest to destroy  
The plants, the trees, the flowers and all that grew.  
No winds, the globe around, such force employ  
When in their jousts and tourneys they fall to.  
He seemed to seek now here, now there, for shelter,  
Lost in a desert, running helter-skelter.

82

The unhappy man meanwhile (he knows not how)  
Has lost his lady in the darkling air.  
He calls her name, now in the forests, now  
In open country, echoes everywhere  
Awakening. 'What powers', he cries, 'allow  
That from a sweetness such as this, so rare,  
Poison so bitter comes?' Entreating aid,  
Her voice is heard in valley, hill and glade.

83

To left and right, up hill, down dale, in vain  
Pursuing her, breathless he seemed to race  
Wherever he could hear her voice. The pain  
Of fearing that her lovely eyes and face  
He'd never in his life behold again  
Tortured his anguished heart. From a new place,  
A new voice called: 'Confirmed are all your fears!  
Then he awoke, his pillow drenched with tears.



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 Briigliodoro 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.

## 8

From one town to another, on he rides  
 And to the margin of a river goes  
 Which Normandy from Brittany divides  
 And gently to the sea in summer flows;  
 But swollen now with rains and flecked besides  
 With the white residue of melting snows,  
 It has destroyed and washed the bridge away,  
 Leaving no means to cross the waterway.

## 9

Along the river-bank Orlando peered  
 To see if he could find a boat whereby  
 (Since he is not a fish, nor yet a bird)  
 He might cross over, when there caught his eye  
 A little ship, in his direction steered.  
 A damsel in the stern he could spy  
 Who made repeated signals with her hand,  
 Nor did she cease until the boat touched land.

## 10

She did not beach the prow, perhaps afraid  
 That he might board the boat against her will.  
 Orlando earnestly besought the maid  
 To help him to pursue his mission still.  
 'I'll take no cavalier across', she said,  
 'Who does not promise first that he'll fulfil  
 An obligation, honourable and just;  
 In all the world there is no worthier trust.

## 11

'So now, if you desire to pass, brave knight,  
 With my assistance to the other shore,  
 First, my condition is that you must plight  
 Your word to me, promising that before  
 Another month goes by you will unite  
 With Ireland's king who is preparing war  
 Against that cruel island named Ebuda:  
 In all the encircling seas there is none cruder.

## 12

'Beyond the coast of Ireland, to the West,  
 There lies, men say, an archipelago.  
 Of all inhabitants the cruellest,  
 Hunting for women the Ebudans go,  
 Whom they then feed to a voracious beast.  
 To claim the dreadful sacrifice they owe,  
 It waits expectantly upon the shore,  
 Adding each day a victim to its score.

## 13

'The trading vessels which those waters ply,  
 Unloading there the cargoes they collect,  
 At intervals replenish the supply  
 Of lovely women, for, if you'll reflect  
 That one a day is destined thus to die,  
 A goodly number's needed, in effect.  
 If pity is no stranger to your heart,  
 If love you serve, let valour be your part.'

## 14

With difficulty can Orlando bear  
 To hear the story out; he plans that he  
 Among the very first will volunteer,  
 As brave knights do when evil deeds they see.  
 He thinks, and by his thought he's moved to fear,  
 Angelica a prisoner must be  
 Of the Ebudans, for he's searched all over  
 And not a trace of her can he discover.

## 15

Imagining her fate, his feelings throw  
 His plans into confusion; with all speed  
 To the vile region he prepares to go  
 Where they are guilty of this hateful deed.  
 He boards a ship not far from St Malo.  
 No sooner from its moorings is it freed,  
 Than he instructs the crew to cram on sail,  
 And that same night they pass Mont St Michel.

88

'Kildare's achievement shows a burning pine.  
By argent, a pale sanguine, Desmond's known.  
Welsh, English, Scots and Irish thus combine  
To help King Charles; but they are not alone,  
For Sweden, Norway, Thulë, now align;  
From distant Iceland, even, troops are gone,  
And every land there is in the Far North,  
By nature warlike, sends its warriors forth.

89

'From caves they come, from rugged forest-lands,  
Horde upon horde; their faces and their chests,  
Their sides, their backs, their legs, their arms, their hands,  
Are covered with long hair like savage beasts.  
The sixteen thousand lances of those bands  
Create a forest where their banner rests.  
Moratto hopes, who holds it on the plain,  
Its whiteness in the blood of Moors to stain.'

90

While on this splendid host, which thus prepares  
To aid the French, his gaze Ruggiero turns,  
And the insignia each banner bears  
And all the British captains' names he learns,  
At him one man and then another stares,  
As each the rare phenomenon discerns.  
In stupefied astonishment they flock  
And round him in a circle stand, to look.

91

Ruggiero, to astonish them the more  
And to derive amusement from the game,  
To his winged quadruped applied the spur  
And rose into the air from whence he came.  
With slackened rein he let the creature soar,  
While those below still more amazed became.  
Then, after viewing all the English force,  
To Ireland in the west he turned his course,

92

That legendary island where, men tell,  
The venerable elder made a cave  
Wherein whoever for a space should dwell  
Remission from his sins him Heaven gave;  
Then, flying farther on, as it befell,  
Towards waters which the Breton coastline lave,  
Whence, passing to the outer Hebrides,  
Angelica chained to the rock he sees,

93

To the bare rock, upon the Isle of Tears  
(For thus the savage island now is named),  
That isle of inhumanity and fears,  
Whose natives for their cruelty are famed,  
As in my story earlier appears.  
I told you how they forage unashamed  
From shore to shore, all lovely women stealing  
To feed an orc, voracious and unfeeling.

94

That very morning she'd been brought and bound  
To where the orc would swallow her alive.  
Such giant monsters in those seas abound  
And on such monstrous diet seem to thrive.  
I have related how the maid was found  
Asleep upon the shore and taken live,  
With the enchanter, where the horse had fetched her,  
And where the fell magician had bewitched her.

95

The harsh, inhospitable islanders  
Exposed the lovely maiden on the strand.  
So absolute a nakedness was hers,  
She might have issued then from Nature's hand.  
No veil or flimsiest of gossamers  
Had she to hide her lily whiteness and  
Her blushing roses, which ne'er fade nor die,  
But in December bloom as in July.

96

He might have thought she was a statue, made  
 By skilful and ingenious artistry  
 Of alabaster or fine marble, laid  
 Upon the rock, but that he chanced to see  
 A tear steal down her countenance, amid  
 The roses and white lilies, tenderly  
 Bedewing the young fruit, so firm and fair,  
 And breezes softly lift her golden hair.

97

As on her lovely eyes his eyes he fixed,  
 His dearest Bradamante came to mind.  
 Love and compassion both his heart transfixed,  
 Tears he could scarce restrain, and in a kind  
 And gentle voice, much puzzled and perplexed  
 (His mount to immobility confined),  
 'O lady, worthy of no chains', he said,  
 'Save those in which Love's servitors are led,

98

'Not this, nor any other such abuse  
 Do you deserve. Who has thus cruelly  
 Enchained you, marking with a livid bruise  
 Those lovely hands of polished ivory?'  
 As craftsmen with a rosy dye suffuse  
 White ivory, so, at his words, now she,  
 Her hidden charms uncovered, blushed for shame  
 And at Ruggiero's gaze abashed became.

99

She'd fain have hid her face, but that her hands  
 Are fastened to the rock, and so her tears,  
 Which she is free to weep, she freely sends  
 To veil her cheeks; her head held low, her fears  
 And sobs she tries to quell; he understands  
 At last some syllables which reach his ears  
 In a low tone; but suddenly she ceases,  
 Arrested by a roaring, which increases.

100

And there the giant monster can be seen,  
 One half submerged; as, buffeted in sport  
 By Auster and Boreas having been,  
 A long, sea-going vessel comes to port,  
 So this foul creature, ravenously keen,  
 Comes for its food. The interval is short.  
 The damsel in her terror is half dead,  
 Nor by assurance is she comforted.

101

Ruggiero did not place his lance in rest  
 But, holding it on high, the orc he smote.  
 A writhing, twisting mass describes it best.  
 No other feature can Ruggiero note  
 By which to recognize it as a beast,  
 Save head and eyes and tusks and gaping throat.  
 Upon its front he strikes, between the eyes,  
 But fails to pierce it, howsoe'er he tries.

102

The first stroke having failed, he smites once more.  
 The orc the shadow of the beating wings  
 Perceives, which moves across the ocean floor  
 Now here, now there, in ever-widening rings.  
 Leaving its certain prey upon the shore,  
 It follows after vain imaginings.  
 Twisting and turning, in pursuit it goes.  
 Ruggiero swoops and deals it many blows.

103

When from on high an eagle fixes on  
 A wily serpent gliding through the grass  
 Or, on a naked rock, coiled in the sun  
 To preen its glistening, golden carapace,  
 Not on that side the bird will strike whereon  
 Its weapons of attack the reptile has,  
 But, swooping from the rear, the venom misses,  
 And claws the writhing snake, for all it hisses.

104

Just so Ruggiero with his lance and sword,  
Not where the muzzle with sharp fangs was armed,  
But where the hateful monster might be gored  
To death and he himself escape unharmed,  
Struck out and, ever watchful, swooped and soared  
As prudence guided him; yet, as though charmed,  
The more in these manoeuvres he persisted,  
The more the beast, like adamant, resisted.

105

Sometimes a battle such as this a fly  
Against a mastiff boldly undertakes  
In August, or September, or July,  
Those months of dust, of vintage, or of stacks  
Of ripened grain, well garnered and laid by.  
Stinging his snout and eyes, the insect makes  
Unceasing darts and sallies, till, mayhap,  
The mastiff is revenged in one fell snap.

106

The monster with its tail the ocean lashes  
In frenzy so extreme, it's my belief  
The water to the very welkin dashes.  
Ruggiero on occasion wonders if  
He flies or swims; he is afraid the splashes,  
Continuing to drench the hippogriff,  
May waterlog its wings, which will in vain  
Attempt to lift him from the sea again.

107

So now he thinks he'll try a new attack,  
Using that weapon of surprise and shock,  
The shield which he keeps hidden in its sack,  
Which all opponents senseless seems to knock,  
But first, as a precaution, he flies back  
To where Angelica lies on the rock  
And on the little finger of one hand  
He quickly slips the magic, golden band.

108

I mean the ring which Bradamante had,  
To free Ruggiero, wrested from Brunel;  
To liberate him later from the bad  
And sinister Alcina, she did well  
To give it to Melissa when she sped  
To India; to break that magic spell,  
As you'll recall, Melissa did not scorn it;  
Ruggiero ever afterwards had worn it.

109

But to Angelica he gives it now,  
Lest she be injured by the magic beam,  
For loath he is such danger to allow  
To those fair eyes of hers which dazzle him.  
The monster now approaches and I vow  
No vaster creatures in the ocean swim.  
Ruggiero bides his time; the veil he raises:  
And lo! a second sun in heaven blazes.

110

The magic luminance the monster's eyes  
Assails and has its usual effect.  
As when a shoal of fish in waters dies  
Which mountain fishermen with lime infect,  
So on that foaming margin supine lies  
The orc, which land and sea alike reject.  
Ruggiero strikes it here and there, but no  
Impression can he make with any blow.

111

The lovely damsel, during the commotion,  
Ruggiero's movements eagerly had followed.  
'Fair sir,' she called to him in deep emotion,  
Fearing the orc might wake where now it wallowed,  
'Release me first, then drown me in the ocean!  
Ah! let me by this monster not be swallowed!'  
Ruggiero saw the justice of her plea.  
Leaving the orc unslain, he set her free.

## 112

The hippogriff, responding to the spur,  
 Braces its hoofs and rises in the air;  
 Away Ruggiero pillion carries her,  
 Depriving thus the monster of its fare.  
 It was, indeed, no fitting connoisseur  
 For this *bonne bouche*, so delicate and rare.  
 He looks behind and thinks he can surmise  
 A thousand kisses promised in her eyes.

## 113

He did not take the course, as he'd intended,  
 Of circumnavigating all of Spain,  
 But on a shore near by instead descended,  
 Where Brittany juts out into the main.  
 A spot he chose by shady oaks defended,  
 Where Philomel's lament is heard again,  
 And where, beside a clearing, is a fountain,  
 Set round about on both sides by a mountain.

## 114

The eager cavalier his daring flight  
 Brought to a halt, and straight away dismounted.  
 One horse he'd curbed, and yet to a new height  
 Upon another he would fain have mounted.  
 One obstacle alone impedes the knight:  
 His armour – and on this he had not counted –  
 His armour keeps him back from his desire  
 And causes him delay, for all his fire.

## 115

And so, in frantic haste to be without it,  
 Disorderedly his armour he removed;  
 And never had he been so long about it,  
 His tackle tangling as he pulled and shoved.  
 My canto is too long (I do not doubt it)  
 And wearisome, my lord, perhaps has proved,  
 And so this history is now postponed  
 Until an hour more pleasing shall be found.

## CANTO XI

## 1

Although a rein has often served to check  
 The impetus of a careering horse,  
 The curb of reason seldom will turn back  
 A lover's ardour from its frenzied course  
 Where pleasure lies to hand; as from its track  
 A prowling bear the smell of honey lures,  
 Or from the jar its tongue may catch a drop,  
 And nothing will induce it then to stop,

## 2

So now, what reason will the knight deter  
 From present pleasure of the lovely maid  
 Whom at his mercy he holds naked there  
 In that convenient and lonely glade?  
 No memories of Bradamante stir  
 His heart and conscience; even if they did  
 (For many times sweet thoughts of her arise)  
 He would be mad to forgo such a prize.

## 3

The harsh Xenocrates himself that day,  
 I swear, would have responded to her charms.  
 His shield and spear already cast away,  
 Ruggiero struggled to remove his arms  
 When, lowering her eyes in her dismay  
 To her bare limbs, now cause of grave alarms,  
 The damsel saw once more upon her hand,  
 What she had lost, that priceless golden band.



28

And I believe the author of these wrongs  
And the unending ill which thence ensued has  
Is now consigned by God where he belongs,  
In the Abyss beside accursèd Judas.  
But let us follow now the knight who longs  
To reach in time that coastline of Ebuda's,  
Where lovely women, delicate and tender,  
The natives to an orc as food surrender.

29

But now the more his haste, the less the wind,  
From whatsoever compass-point, would blow.  
For signs of wind he searched the hyalined  
Horizon, peering from the poop or prow.  
At times the lack of headway filled his mind  
With deep despair at all the miles to go.  
Then by the head so violently it blew,  
He had to run before or heave her to.

30

It was God's will that he delayed should be,  
The king of Ireland's coming to await,  
In order that with more facility  
Events might come to pass, which I'll relate.  
But when at last the island he could see,  
Orlando to his pilot said: 'Here wait;  
Give me the landing-craft, which I will row  
To yonder rock, for there alone I'll go.

31

'And look me out likewise the strongest cable;  
And, next, the largest anchor I will take.  
To see why I require them you'll be able  
If contact with the monster I can make.'  
The skiff was duly lowered and, when stable,  
All that he needed for the journey's sake  
(No weapons, save his sword) on board was laid,  
And for the dreadful rock, alone, he made.

32

Pulling the oars towards his chest, he looks  
In the reverse direction from the one  
He gains, as from the sea towards the rocks  
Or to the shore a crab will sideways run.  
It was the hour when Dawn her golden locks  
Has shaken loose and flowing in the sun,  
Her loveliness half clad, half naked, shown us,  
Stirring the jealousy of old Tithonus.

33

As far as a strong arm a stone might throw  
The island was when, still approaching it,  
He seems to hear, yet not to hear, a low  
Lament which breezes fitfully repeat;  
And, to the left, he glimpses there below  
(The water gently lapping at her feet),  
Bound to a tree, a damsel all forlorn,  
As naked as the day when she was born.

34

As he is still too far away and she  
Her face holds low, he cannot yet discern  
It, nor be sure of her identity.  
Both oars he plies in eagerness to learn,  
When a great roar arises suddenly;  
The woods and caves resound, the waters churn,  
And lo! the dreadful monster now appears  
And half the sea beneath it disappears.

35

As from a gloomy vale a cloud of rain,  
Laden with tempest, rises in the air,  
The daylight quenching with so dark a stain  
That blindest night may not with it compare,  
So now the orc approaches, of the main  
Enveloping an all-embracing share.  
The waters shake; unmoved Orlando stays,  
The monster fixing with a haughty gaze.



36

Like one who has resolved what he will do,  
With rapid movements, calm and purposeful,  
Between the damsel and the orc he drew,  
Thus with one stroke to make it possible  
To save her and attack the monster too.  
His good blade leaving in its scabbard still,  
He took the cable, to the anchor mated,  
And for the monster, with high courage, waited.

37

The monster, which the paladin soon spied,  
Opened its mouth to gulp him down its throat,  
Forming a cavern where a man might ride  
On horseback; there Orlando entered, boat  
And all, if I mistake not; and inside,  
The gaping gullet with the anchor smote.  
One of the flukes was from its palate hung;  
The other was embedded in its tongue.

38

Thus neither jaw the monster can move up  
Or down; just so, as further underground  
A miner burrows, with a metal prop  
He underpins the earth above all round,  
Lest, as he works, it should collapse on top  
Of him and bury him beneath its mound.  
So far apart the anchor's arms extend,  
Orlando cannot reach from end to end.

39

Knowing the monster cannot close its jaws,  
For he has made the anchor well secure,  
His Durindana from its sheath he draws  
And lays about him in that cave obscure.  
As the besieged will every hindrance cause  
To those who in their walls a breach procure,  
So every method then of self-defence  
The orc employed to spew Orlando hence.

40

Weakened by pain, it thrashed to either hand,  
Exposing now its flanks and now its spine,  
Or, diving, with its belly stirred the sand,  
Which in a shower rose to cloud the brine.  
So, judging it was time to make for land  
(Or to a watery grave himself resign),  
Leaving the monster's gullet thus imbrangled,  
He seized the rope which from the anchor dangled.

41

Then he began with rapid strokes to swim  
Towards the naked rock, where he sets foot  
And gradually hauls in after him  
The rope, the anchor and, at last, the brute,  
In mortal peril of its life and limb  
By virtue of his strength, of world repute,  
That strength which with one single tug pulls more  
Than any capstan pulled ten times before.

42

As a wild bull, which feels about his horn  
The sudden tightening of a hunter's noose,  
Will leap and plunge and rear and twist and turn,  
In all its vain endeavours to break loose,  
So, from its ancient element now torn  
By that strong arm, the orc, with many a ruse,  
With many a sudden jerk, and many a twist,  
The rope in vain attempted to resist.

43

So copiously from its mouth it bled,  
Its lashing tail so furiously plied,  
The sea that day might well be called the Red,  
And might be seen to open and divide.  
The tossing waves to such a height are sped,  
They reach the welkin, and the sunlight hide.  
The woods, the mountains and the distant shores  
Re-echo with the savage monster's roars.

44

The ancient Proteus from his grotto came.  
He'd seen Orlando enter and then leave  
That gaping mouth; then, witnessing its shame,  
He'd seen him to the shore the monster heave.  
And at this uproar, heedless he became  
Of all his flock, and fled; and I believe  
That Neptune's dolphins harnessed were that day  
To speed to Ethiopia straight away.

45

Ino, all tears, her offspring in her arms,  
The Nereids, their tresses loose and flowing,  
The followers of Glaucus, all alarms,  
The Tritons fled, in all directions going.  
Orlando so disables and disarms  
The orc, no vestige now of life is showing;  
By pain and travail sorely mortified,  
Before it reached the water's edge, it died.

46

Quite a few islanders had run to see  
The strange event in which the orc was slain.  
A deed so holy seems profanity  
To those who hold to heathen creeds and vain.  
They said it would renew the enmity  
Of Proteus, who would send his flock again  
To ravage and despoil their island shore,  
The ancient quarrel flaring up once more.

47

They judge it will be best to sacrifice  
To the offended god ere worse occur,  
And, to placate him, deem it will suffice  
To cast the body of the warrior  
Into the raging sea; as in a trice  
A flame is caught from torch to torch, so there  
A burning hatred, spread from heart to heart,  
Destined Orlando for the victim's part.

48

With bows and arrows, slings and swords and spears,  
The natives now descend upon the shore.  
From this side and from that a group appears,  
Far off, approaching, near, behind, before.  
With all this bestial rabble round his ears,  
Which threatens to assail him more and more,  
Orlando, in astonishment, perceives,  
Not thanks, but blows and insults he receives.

49

As when a bear, by Lithuanians led,  
Or Russians, who divert the visitors  
To fairs, goes by unmoved with plodding tread,  
By the shrill insolence of yapping curs  
So unperturbed it scarce will turn its head,  
So, at this onrush, not a tremor stirs  
The paladin, who, with one single breath,  
That savage horde could scatter to their death.

50

A space in front of him was quickly made  
Where, sword in hand, he turned to face the mob.  
The rabble so deluded were and mad,  
They thought, because he was divested of  
Cuirass, and neither helm nor buckler had,  
Without resistance he would let them rob  
Him of his life; if only they had known,  
From top to toe he was as hard as stone.

51

And what against him others cannot do,  
Orlando, for his part, can do full well.  
Thirty he kills, with but ten strokes, or few  
More, if the truth precisely I must tell.  
He turns, thus disencumbered, to undo  
The damsel's bonds, when tumult, audible  
From yet another quarter, meets his ears  
And echoes of it everywhere he hears.

52

For while, upon this side, the paladin  
Has held the heathen rabble thus engaged,  
The king of Ireland's army has moved in  
And, unresisted, through the island raged.  
Attacks upon the populace begin;  
On every side ferocious war is waged,  
A holocaust which no compunction checks,  
In which no heed is paid to age or sex.

53

The cruel islanders make no defence,  
Partly because they're taken by surprise,  
Partly because of poor intelligence  
The population is, and small in size.  
Thus they submit to fire and violence  
And every battlement in ruin lies;  
At every home and farmstead troops arrive  
And not a single soul is left alive.

54

Orlando all this time remains aloof  
To all the tumult and the shrieks he hears.  
Thinking by now his foes have had enough,  
The rock whereon the damsel waits he nears.  
He looks, he seems to know her, and for proof  
He draws still closer to the maid in tears:  
It is, it is Olimpia indeed,  
Betrayed by so iniquitous a deed,

55

Wretched Olimpia, to whom when Love  
Had done his worst, relentless, cruel Fate  
Had sent a band of pirates to remove  
Her to the Isle of Tears, there to await  
A dreadful death! Seeing Orlando move  
About the rock, she knows him by his gait,  
But, naked, and ashamed of her disgrace,  
She cannot bear to look him in the face.

56

Orlando asked by what iniquity  
To this dread island she had been transferred.  
He'd left her in her consort's company,  
Serene and joyful; what, then, had occurred?  
'I know not if I owe you thanks', said she,  
'For saving me from death, which I preferred  
To this my wretched life, or if instead  
I should reproach you that I am not dead,

57

'For this I thank you, that I have not shared  
A death so cruel in the hideous  
Vile belly of that monster, where I feared  
To make an end so ignominious;  
And yet I do not thank you that I'm spared,  
For death alone to me is bounteous.  
I'll render thanks to you for but one thing,  
That sweet release which death alone can bring.'

58

And, weeping bitterly, she told him then  
How she had been abandoned by her spouse,  
Who left her sleeping on the island when  
He had betrayed her and his marriage-vows,  
And how brought hence by pirates she had been.  
As far as the restricted space allows,  
She turns while speaking, as in paint or stone  
We see Diana turn from Actaeon.

59

As best she can she hides her breast and loins,  
Leaving exposed the beauty of her thighs.  
Orlando, who has freed her from her chains,  
To bring his drifting boat to harbour tries  
(To find some garments for her there he plans);  
But now upon the scene Oberto hies,  
The king of Ireland, whom the news had reached  
How on the shore the deadly orc lay stretched.

## CANTO XX

## I

Women in ancient times have wondrous things  
 Performed in arms and in the sacred arts.  
 Their deeds, their works, their fair imaginings  
 Resound in glory in all minds and hearts.  
 Harpalyce and Camilla Clio sings,  
 In battle skilled, in strategy experts,  
 Sappho and Corinna, in whom genius flamed  
 In splendour shine and are for ever famed.

## 2

And truly women have excelled indeed  
 In every art to which they set their hand,  
 And any who to history pay heed  
 Their fame will find diffused in every land.  
 If in some ages they do not succeed,  
 Their renaissance is not for ever banned.  
 Envy their merits has perhaps concealed  
 Or unawareness left them unrevealed.

## 3

Such talent in this century, I think,  
 Is seen in women lovely to behold,  
 That there will be much work for pen and ink  
 Ere chroniclers the full account unfold,  
 And envious calumny at last shall sink,  
 With lies which evil tongues so long have told;  
 Such praises will be sung as to surpass  
 Marfisa's fame, when this has come to pass.

## 4

Returning now to her, the valiant maid  
 Did not refuse to tell the courteous knight  
 What he desired to know, for not delayed  
 His readiness her favour to requite  
 Would be; the debt she owed she quickly paid,  
 That he reciprocate the sooner might.  
 'I am', she said, 'Marfisa', and this name  
 Sufficed to tell him all, such was her fame.

## 5

And he, for his part, without more ado,  
 Although with more preamble, now began:  
 'I well believe to every one of you  
 Is known the name of all my race and clan,  
 For throughout France and Spain, their neighbours too,  
 India, Ethiopia, Pontus, every man  
 Clear knowledge has of Clairmont, whence is sprung  
 Almonte's slayer, of whom praise is sung.

## 6

'And he who Chiariel has slain and King  
 Mambrino and their kingdoms overthrown.  
 By this same blood, where Danube, emptying  
 Ten mouths, the Black Sea joins, by Duke Aymon,  
 Who in that region was then sojourning,  
 My mother fashioned me of flesh and bone.  
 A year ago I left her sad of mien,  
 And went to France to seek my kith and kin.

## 7

'My journey I could not complete, alas!  
 A wind propelled me here relentlessly.  
 Ten months ago, or more, I think it was.  
 I count each hour of my captivity.  
 Guidon Selvaggio is my name, and as  
 A knight nobody yet has heard of me.  
 Here I slew Argilon of Melibea and  
 The ten who, one by one, fell by my hand.

96

Scarce have they touched the ground than up again  
 They spring and combat straight away renew.  
 In frenzied rage they cut and thrust amain.  
 With shield or blade they parry, or with due  
 And timely leaps, and all the blows they rain  
 Resound to heaven, be they false or true.  
 Those habergeons, those shields, those helmets of  
 Fine-tempered steel than anvils stronger prove.

97

If the fierce damsel has a heavy arm,  
 The cavalier's, for his part, is not light.  
 Being well matched in size and strength, the harm  
 They do each other they can each requite.  
 Who seeks two heroes to inspire alarm  
 Or wonder need not look beyond this sight.  
 No one has seen more prowess or more skill  
 Than these two represent, nor ever will.

98

The women who for long amazed have watched  
 The ceaseless interchange of fearsome blows,  
 Seeing the knights unwearied, though they fetched  
 Stroke upon stroke, in need of no repose,  
 Declare them both unequalled and unmatched,  
 Throughout all lands which Ocean's arms enclose.  
 It seems to them they should be dead and gone,  
 But for their strength, from the fatigue alone.

99

Then, speaking to herself, Marfisa said:  
 'It was as well for me this knight stood still  
 And did not join those others whom he led,  
 Else had the outcome of that fight gone ill  
 For me, and I might very well be dead,  
 For, as it is, his blows come nigh to kill.'  
 Thus she reflected, though without a pause  
 Her sword she wielded and still fighting was.

100

'It was as well', the knight was thinking too,  
 'I did not let him rest before this fight.  
 Defend myself is all that I can do;  
 So if in slumber he had passed the night,  
 And with fresh vigour, when the day was new,  
 Had challenged me, what would have been my plight?  
 It was more fortunate than words can say  
 That he preferred to fight with me today.'

101

The battle lasted till the evening fell,  
 Yet which of them had won was still not clear.  
 Neither, without a lamp, henceforth could tell  
 When to avoid each other's thrusts, or where.  
 Then as the dark increased, the knight thought well  
 To say to her he deemed a cavalier:  
 'What shall we do now that the shades of night  
 Descend impartially to stop our fight?'

102

'I think it will be better to prolong  
 Your life until tomorrow dawns at least.  
 I can allow no more; one night, not long,  
 I grant by which your days may be increased.  
 Do not impute this to me as a wrong,  
 But, rather, lay the blame where it fits best:  
 On laws, so merciless, which sorely vex  
 This kingdom governed by the female sex.'

103

'If I now grieve for you and for your friends,  
 He knows to Whom all things are clearly known.  
 And you must be my guests, to make amends;  
 With me you will be safe, and there alone:  
 Because the crowd whose husbands met their ends  
 Conspiring are that vengeance shall be done.  
 For every one whom you today have slain,  
 Of women you have thereby widowed ten.'

96

When Vivian and Malagigi are  
 To be exchanged, that day the trio reach  
 Bayona; this is an arid region where  
 No cypresses, no ash-trees and no beech  
 Protect the naked land from the sun's glare;  
 No laurel-trees, no myrtle-bushes which  
 Give shade are to be seen amongst the scrub,  
 But only sparse, uncultivated shrub.

97

The three brave warriors at last drew rein,  
 And where a narrow path could be discerned  
 They saw a knight in armour cross the plain.  
 A banner with a golden border burned;  
 It bore as emblem on a field of green  
 That long-lived bird, the phoenix. I have earned,  
 My lord, a rest; this canto's at an end.  
 My song, with your permission, I suspend.

## CANTO XXVI

I

Women of chivalry in olden days  
 There were, who valued manly valour more  
 Than wealth; quite other now are women's ways,  
 For most of them on gain set highest store.  
 Those women in whom virtue rightly plays  
 The greater part such avarice abhor,  
 Content to follow truth and righteousness  
 In hope of glory and eternal bliss.

2

Praise everlasting Bradamante earned,  
 Who loved not riches and not power desired,  
 But for Ruggiero's martial valour burned  
 And to his noble excellence aspired.  
 And he, as she deserved, her worth discerned;  
 His bosom by her loveliness was fired.  
 To please her he performs heroic deeds.  
 All other knights in prowess he exceeds.

3

Now with the Clairmonts, as you are aware,  
 Ruggiero rode; these cousins thought it right  
 (I speak of Ricciardet and Aldigier)  
 To save two brothers from a gruesome plight.  
 Across the plain they'd seen a cavalier  
 Approach – an arrogant and haughty knight,  
 Flaunting the bird which rises from the flame  
 Renewed, unique and of undying fame.



## 4

And when the oncomer observed the three,  
 Each poised for combat, ready to set off,  
 This seemed a welcome opportunity  
 To test their worth. When she was near enough,  
 She challenged them: 'Who dares to fight with me  
 With lance or sword? I'd like to see what stuff  
 You're made of; and the one who stays upright  
 Shall be declared the winner of the fight.'

## 5

'Gladly', said Aldigier, 'I'd try my skill  
 Against you, wielding either lance or sword,  
 But with another task, which, if you will,  
 You can observe, such test does not accord.  
 No time to joust, nor even to stand still  
 In parleying with you, can we afford.  
 Six hundred men who'll reach the cross-roads soon  
 We have today to try our prowess on.'

## 6

'Two of our kith and kin it is our plan  
 To rescue, whom their captors here will bring.'  
 And he goes on to tell, as best he can,  
 The story of the cruel bartering.  
 'If this excuse is true,' the knight began,  
 'Which I cannot gainsay, then everything  
 You tell me makes it plain that there can be  
 Few knights who are the equal of you three.'

## 7

'I hoped I might exchange a blow or two,  
 To test your valour and your expertise;  
 But if your skill you are prepared to show  
 At someone else's cost, then, as you please.  
 I only ask that I may fight your foe,  
 And with a shield and helmet such as these,  
 If you accept, I hope to demonstrate  
 That no unworthy ally you have met.'

## 8

Someone, I think, would like to know the name  
 Of him who offers to assist the three  
 Who to the rescue of the brothers came,  
 So I will say the cavalier is she  
 (Not he or him henceforth), that very same  
 Marfisa, who a toll of chivalry  
 Exacted from Zerbino, binding him  
 To do the vile Gabrina's every whim.

## 9

The Clairmont cousins and the good Ruggier  
 Welcomed Marfisa gladly as a fourth,  
 For they believed she was a cavalier,  
 Not knowing her true sex nor her true worth.  
 A banner was soon spied by Aldigier,  
 Which fitful breezes fluttered back and forth.  
 Alerted, his companions watch the train  
 Of men-at-arms who wind across the plain.

## 10

And as the hostile column closer drew,  
 Their Moorish dress could plainly be made out;  
 So they were Saracens, the allies knew,  
 And in their midst they saw, beyond all doubt,  
 Pinioned, each on a little nag, the two  
 Defenceless brothers. Then with a great shout  
 Marfisa cried, 'What are we waiting for?  
 This party offers merriment galore!'

## 11

Ruggiero answered, 'But not all the guests  
 Have yet arrived; many are missing still.  
 Such preparation for a ball suggests  
 A gala day; we must use all our skill.  
 So let us choose the festive games and jests,  
 And with our partners frolic as we will.'  
 The traitors of Maganza now advance  
 And it is almost time to start the dance.'

## 12

The Maganzese from one direction ride,  
 Leading their mules weighed down with merchandise —  
 Rich garments, gold and precious goods beside,  
 While from the other come, with downcast eyes,  
 The captive brothers, hemmed in on each side  
 With lances, swords and bows, a costly prize;  
 And cruel Bertolagi could be heard  
 As with the Moorish captain he conferred.

## 13

Neither Count Buovo's nor Count Aymon's son  
 At sight of him can any more delay.  
 Couching their lances, at their foe they run.  
 One lance the traitor's paunch is seen to splay,  
 First piercing the front saddle-bow, and one  
 Splits both his cheeks. Ah, would that in this way  
 The world of evil-doers might be rid  
 And traitors die as Bertolagi did!

## 14

And at this signal, waiting for no blast  
 Upon a trumpet, both the other knights,  
 Marfisa and Ruggiero, follow fast.  
 Each with the foe with lance unbroken fights  
 Till from the saddle three of them are cast:  
 Ruggiero first the Moorish leader smites,  
 A worthy enemy, and next, with him,  
 Two more are sped to regions drear and dim.

## 15

From this, confusion in the ranks arose  
 Which brought about their ultimate defeat;  
 On the one side the Maganzese suppose  
 That they have been betrayed; the Moors, who meet  
 With like affront, the Frankish side abuse  
 As vile assassins, and the noise and heat  
 Of battle now begins, as weapons clash,  
 As lances hurtle and as arrows flash.

## 16

Between the lines Ruggiero alternates,  
 Killing now ten, now twenty, at one swoop.  
 Likewise Marfisa's weapon decimates  
 Now first the one and then another troop.  
 Touched by the blade the victims meet their fates  
 At once and from their saddles sag and droop.  
 Helmets and breastplates vanish all around,  
 Crashing like burning timber to the ground.

## 17

If you recall that you have ever seen,  
 Or if report has ever reached your ears,  
 How when a swarm of bees has risen in  
 A warlike cloud, a swallow then appears,  
 Skimming among them greedily with keen  
 And snapping beak, so the two cavaliers,  
 Ruggiero and Marfisa, seemed to be  
 Two swallows swooping on the enemy.

## 18

But Ricciardetto and his cousin chose  
 To trip a measure less diversified.  
 Leaving the Saracens to the others' blows,  
 They now bore down on the Maganzan side.  
 The prowess which Rinaldo's brother owes  
 To knightly training is now multiplied,  
 Till he is brave and strong enough for two,  
 By hate for his hereditary foe.

## 19

And the same hatred makes the bastard son  
 Of Buovo seem a lion in his rage.  
 Without a pause he lays his weapon on,  
 Splitting the helms like eggs with its sharp edge;  
 But who such daring would not then have shown,  
 Or seemed a Hector born in a new age,  
 Having companions like Ruggiero and  
 Marfisa, unsurpassed in every land?

20

Marfisa, never pausing in her fight,  
 Glanced round at her companions now and then.  
 Seeing such proof of prowess and of might,  
 She was amazed to see the number slain;  
 But most of all she marvelled at the sight  
 Of him she deemed unequalled among men.  
 This must be Mars himself, she thought, come down  
 From his fifth heaven, lending us renown.

21

She marvelled at Ruggiero's deadly blows.  
 She marvelled, too, at their unerring aim.  
 When Balisarda struck, you would suppose  
 That iron, paper suddenly became.  
 However thick the armour of the foes,  
 In twain the weapon sliced them just the same,  
 Down to their very steeds, and sent them flying  
 Till here, there, everywhere the dead were lying.

22

Sometimes the selfsame stroke would follow through,  
 Killing the horse together with the man.  
 From shoulders, heads in all directions flew,  
 Torsos were severed where the hips began.  
 Five at one blow and even more he slew.  
 Did I not fear to go beyond the span  
 Of what can be believed, I would say more,  
 But here the truth the face of falsehood wore.

23

Turpin, relating marvels such as these,  
 Knows that he speaks the unvarnished truth and leaves  
 His hearers to accept whate'er they please.  
 He says (you may consider he deceives)  
 Almost as though Marfisa's enemies  
 Were ice, they melt as, like a torch, she weaves  
 Among their ranks, causing no less surprise  
 Than he on whom she turns astonished eyes.

24

If she the god of war considered him,  
 Ruggiero in his turn could equally  
 Bellona this amazing damsel deem,  
 Did he but know the truth, so contrary  
 To what her skill and courage make her seem.  
 Between them then arose keen rivalry.  
 Alas for their poor foes, upon whose flesh,  
 Blood, sinews, bones they now compete afresh!

25

The valour and the skill of four suffice  
 To put both armies in the field to rout.  
 The legs of horses are the best device  
 For those who flee, of that there is no doubt.  
 They have a value now beyond all price,  
 The gallop being better than the trot,  
 And he who has no steed soon notices  
 That war on foot a sad profession is.

26

Victorious, the four survey the plain.  
 The field is won, the booty now is theirs,  
 For neither Moors nor Maganzese remain;  
 Gone are all men-at-arms and muleteers,  
 Who'd fled in two directions from the scene,  
 Leaving the prisoners and precious wares.  
 They set the brothers free with joyful hearts  
 And many a willing hand unloading starts.

27

Not only silver in great quantity  
 They found, fashioned in divers plates and bowls,  
 And women's clothes with rich embroidery,  
 And, fit for palaces, long, precious rolls  
 Of gold and silken Flemish tapestry,  
 Of which the beauty all the world extols,  
 And many other rich and costly things,  
 But also wine and bread and victuallings.

28

When all have drawn their helmets off, the three  
 Observe to whom they owe such timely aid:  
 The golden, curling tresses they now see,  
 And the fair features, of a lovely maid.  
 They greatly honour her and beg that she  
 Will not conceal her name, which she has made  
 Deserving of such glory; she replied  
 With courtesy and with their wish complied.

29

They gaze their fill upon her countenance,  
 Remembering her valour as a knight.  
 Upon the others she scarce deigns to glance,  
 But keeps Ruggiero only in her sight  
 And talks with him; the servants now advance  
 And all the gallant company invite  
 To take their places in the hill's cool shade,  
 Beside a fountain where a meal is laid.

30

This fountain, made by Merlin (one of four  
 In France) was girdled by a fair surround  
 Of polished marble, white as milk and more;  
 Figures, exquisitely inlaid all round,  
 Witness to the magician's handwork bore.  
 You would have said they breathed, save that no sound  
 Escaped their lips; each one appeared to live,  
 So wondrously did Merlin's art deceive.

31

They saw a loathsome beast depicted there,  
 Cruel and ugly, with a wolfish head  
 And fangs, and asses' ears; its body, spare  
 And fox-like, looked as if it seldom fed,  
 Despite its lion's claws to rend and tear.  
 Through England, France, Spain, Italy it sped,  
 Throughout all Europe and through Asia too,  
 Till all the world its fearful havoc knew.

32

It killed or wounded everywhere it went,  
 No less the highest than the lowliest,  
 For those who suffered its most violent  
 Attack were kings and princes and not least  
 The Roman court, where with malign intent  
 Prelates and Popes were murdered by the beast.  
 Infinite scandal it had brought upon  
 The Faith, contaminating Peter's throne.

33

Before its onslaught, crumbles every wall;  
 No rampart but must yield at its approach;  
 There is no citadel which does not fall;  
 All gates of castles open at its touch.  
 Worshipped as if divine by fools who call  
 It prudence, it will further yet encroach,  
 For to itself it abrogates as well  
 The very keys of Heaven and of Hell.

34

Crowned with imperial laurel now appears  
 A knight and at his side another three;  
 All are of royal standing, each one wears  
 A surcoat woven with the fleur-de-lis;  
 And with a banner similar to theirs,  
 A lion moves with awesome majesty.  
 And on their garments or above each head  
 Their names and titles may be plainly read.

35

That one who in the monster's belly plants  
 His sword up to the very hilt is named  
 In marble script: Francis the First of France;  
 And Maximilian is next proclaimed,  
 Of Austria, and Charles the Fifth, whose lance  
 Pierces the monster's throat; of one who aimed  
 An arrow at its heart, the English king,  
 Henry the Eighth, a future age will sing.

36

'The Tenth' is written on the lion's back.  
Sinking his fangs into the monster's ears,  
He shakes it; others run to the attack  
And gone, it seems, are all men's doubts and fears.  
That former errors may be kept in check,  
An army, moderate in size, appears  
And soon it rids the world of the vile beast,  
And mankind now it ceases to molest.

37

Marfisa and the cavaliers desire  
To know who all these warriors may be  
By whose stern hands they see the beast expire,  
That cause of sorrow and iniquity.  
And so, of one another they enquire  
(For though the names and titles they can see,  
These have no meaning in those far-off days)  
What is the story which the fount displays.

38

Viviano looked at Malagigi, who  
Stood listening, but had uttered not a word.  
He said, 'This marble story is for you  
To expound, for you are learned, I have heard.  
What men are these, who divers arms imbue  
In that beast's blood which has their wrath incurred?'  
And Malagigi said, 'This history  
Is no part yet of any memory.

39

'For you must know, all these who, each by name,  
Are indicated here, are not yet born;  
But seven hundred years from now, their fame  
The temples of the future will adorn.  
Merlin the sorcerer from Britain came  
In brave King Arthur's time and one fine morn  
Gave orders for this fountain to be made  
And by the finest craftsmen thus inlaid.

40

'This monster issued from the depths of Hell,  
When weights and measures in the world were new,  
When property was made divisible,  
When pen and ink recorded what was due.  
At first not every land, as I heard tell,  
The monster ravaged; some, exemption knew.  
The harm it does today, although widespread,  
To men of low degree is limited.

41

'From its beginnings to the present age,  
The monster has been growing and will grow,  
Until, of all the beasts which havoc wage,  
No larger, no more vile, the world can show.  
The famous python, which on many a page  
Has been described, was large as pythons go,  
Yet was not half so large as this will be,  
Nor was it so detestable to see.

42

'Much cruel slaughter will this beast commit.  
There'll be no region it will not infect,  
No country which will be immune from it,  
No town it will not damage or affect.  
And of such torment longing to be quit,  
The world will cry for help, and these elect,  
Shining like oriflammes, whose names we read,  
Will save the nations in their hour of need.

43

'The beast will have no more relentless foe  
Than Francis the French monarch, of that name  
The First; such skill and valour he will show  
That many who seem valiant he will shame.  
No equal and few rivals he will know.  
His royal splendour and heroic fame  
Will others' deeds eclipse, as by the sun  
All lesser lights are instantly outshone.

44

'In the first year of his auspicious reign,  
The crown being scarcely settled on his brow,  
He'll cross the Alps, where he will render vain  
The plan to hold the pass, revealing how  
His heart is stirred by wrath and just disdain  
That the disgrace is not avenged ere now  
Which frenzied herdsmen on the French will bring  
With savage and ferocious battering.

45

'To the rich Lombard plain he will descend,  
Surrounded by the flower of all France,  
And Switzerland to such submission bend  
That checked for ever is her arrogance.  
The Church and Spain and Florence will defend  
A fortress, but in vain, for he'll advance  
Upon it and will storm the citadel  
Which they had deemed to be impregnable.

46

'The weapon that will serve his purpose best  
Will be that honoured sword by means of which  
He will have previously slain the beast,  
Corruptor of all regions and of each  
Community; no standard makes the least  
Resistance; not a rampart, not a ditch,  
And not a wall, however thick and strong,  
Will keep a citadel secure for long.

47

'This prince in all the virtues will excel  
Which any conqueror has ever shown:  
Great Caesar's courage, and that prudent skill  
Whence Trebbia and Lake Trasimene were won,  
And Alexander's lucky star as well,  
Without which every plan is overthrown.  
Such liberality he will possess,  
There is no measure he will not surpass.'

48

Thus Malagigi read the marble screed,  
Inspiring in the knights a wish to know  
The names of other figures who, instead  
Of slaying the infernal monster, show  
How best to set about the noble deed.  
He said, 'That one whom Merlin places so,  
Bernardo, will confer upon Bibbiena  
Renown eclipsing Florence and Siena.

49

'And to the forefront, each a paragon,  
Are Sigismond, Giovanni and Ludovic  
(Gonzaga, Salviati, Aragon),  
Who the destruction of the monster seek.  
Francis of Mantua, likewise his son  
Who follows in his footsteps, Frederick;  
Two dukes, Ferrara's and Urbino's, stand,  
Brother and son by marriage, on each hand.

50

'And Guidobaldo, son of one of these,  
Does not intend to linger at the back.  
Eager as Ottobono Fieschi, he's  
As quick as Sinibaldo to attack;  
And Luigi of Gazolo's arrow is  
So swift, the metal burns the creature's neck.  
Phoebus, the archer-god, will grant him bow  
And quiver, Mars himself a sword bestow.

51

'Two Ercoles and two Ippolitos  
Of Este; and of these names another two  
(A Medici and a Gonzaga, those)  
The traces of the weary beast pursue.  
Giuliano with his offspring level goes,  
Ferrante with his brother; near by too  
Andrea Doria stands vigilant.  
No passage will Francesco Sforza grant.



52

'Of noble, generous, illustrious blood,  
Two of Avàlos carry as their sign  
A mighty rock, like that which long has stood  
Holding Typhoeus helpless in confine.  
No injury against the monster could  
Exceed the blows which these two will combine.  
Francesco of Pescara one is named,  
And one Alfonso of Vasto is proclaimed.'

53

But what of the great commandant of Spain,  
Consalvo, who was held in such esteem,  
Whom Malagigi praised and praised again?  
Few in that band there were to equal him.  
And last, of all those who the beast had slain,  
William of Monferrat not least I deem.  
Few were those heroes in comparison  
With those the brute had wounded or undone.

54

In games or converse, after their repast,  
Together they beguiled the heat of day,  
Or else beside the fountain took their rest  
'Mid shady shrubs, or on fine carpets lay.  
While the two brothers, in full armour dressed,  
Kept guard lest any should approach that way,  
A lady, unescorted, soon they see,  
Who rides towards them with rapidity.

55

It is Ippalca, who set out to lead  
Frontino to Ruggiero, as his love  
Desired, and was obliged to yield the steed  
To Rodomonte; all that day she strove  
To follow him; in vain she tried to plead,  
Or curse: the miscreant she could not move.  
Then on her way she learned (I know not how)  
Ruggiero was with Ricciardetto now.

56

And since she knew the territory well,  
For she had been there many times before,  
She rode towards the fountain without fail,  
Finding Ruggiero and the others (for  
They'd rested there a while, as you heard tell).  
And she, who was observant and still more  
Discreet, when she saw Ricciardetto there,  
Feigned not to know or recognize Ruggier.

57

She turned to Ricciardetto straight away,  
As though her message were for him alone.  
He rose to welcome her without delay,  
Asking her where she went. Her eyes still shone  
With tears, and sighing she began to say  
(Though speaking audibly in a clear tone  
In order that Ruggiero, who stood nigh,  
Might hear how sorrowful she was, and why):

58

'I was conducting on a leading-rein,  
As Bradamante had commanded me,  
A splendid destrier, with flowing mane;  
Frontino he is called, a horse which she  
Most dearly loves; my orders were to gain  
A region near Marseilles where she would be  
Ere many days had passed; I was to wait  
Till she should come where we arranged to meet.

59

'My heart was confident, I had no fear  
That anyone would try to take the steed.  
Its owner's name I deemed enough to hear –  
Rinaldo's sister, famed for many a deed;  
But yesterday an African drew near;  
He was on foot and of a mount had need.  
I told him Bradamante owned the horse  
And yet he seized the rein from me by force.

60

'I followed him, beseeching him in vain.  
Throughout all yesterday and all today  
I cursed and menaced and besought again.  
I left him finally not far away,  
Fighting, hard-pressed, with all his might and main,  
Against a warrior whose prowess may  
Bring down revenge for me upon his head –  
A retribution just and merited.'

61

Ruggiero at these words leapt to his feet,  
And scarcely could he wait to hear them all.  
He turns to Ricciardetto to entreat,  
If he considers he has served him well,  
That he may leave without delay to meet  
This unknown knight, and that Ippalca shall  
Go with him to point out the arrogant,  
Importunate horse-stealing miscreant.

62

Although it seems to him unchivalrous  
To leave to someone else an enterprise  
Which thus concerns a member of his house,  
Yet Ricciardetto with this wish complies;  
And so Ruggiero takes a courteous  
Farewell of his companions, whose surprise  
And wonder know no bounds when they observe  
His resolution and unfailing nerve.

63

When she had led the knight some way apart,  
Ippalca then revealed the true account –  
How she was sent by her upon whose heart  
His image was engraved to bring the mount  
To him, and she proceeded to impart  
(No longer feigning now, as at the fount,  
When she saw Ricciardetto standing near)  
All that her lady bade her tell Ruggier.

64

She added that with overbearing pride,  
On learning who Frontino's owner was,  
The Saracen had straight away replied:  
'What you have told me gives me greater cause  
To take the horse; my name I will not hide.  
Throughout the world its splendour overawes  
Whoever hears it. Should Ruggiero want  
His steed, tell him to seek out Rodomont.'

65

Ruggiero's rising colour soon reveals,  
As he lends ear to what Ippalca says,  
The wrath and indignation which he feels.  
Frontino's dear to him in many ways;  
This noble horse which Rodomonte steals  
He nurtured with great love; if he delays  
He sees his honour is in jeopardy.  
This outrage straight away avenged must be.

66

Ippalca willingly Ruggiero guides,  
Longing to see the offender make amends.  
She brings him soon to where the road divides.  
One branch goes to the plain, and one ascends  
The hill; but to the valley, from both sides,  
Each of these paths returns at last and ends.  
Though steep, the upward route, Ippalca knew,  
Was, strange to say, the shorter of the two.

67

Ippalca's eager longing to regain  
Frontino and to bring revenge upon  
The African leads her to turn the rein  
Towards the hill; but Rodomont has gone  
Along the slower route towards the plain,  
Together with the three who follow on;  
And so he does not meet the angry pair  
Who search for him – Ippalca and Ruggier.

68

The enmity between the other two  
Had been deferred till they could help their king.  
With them (you know) was Doralice who  
Had caused their strife. Now hear me while I sing  
The sequel of their history to you:  
As to the fountain they come cantering,  
They see the brothers, Aldigier, Marfise,  
And Ricciardetto, who recline at ease.

69

Marfisa, in response to the request  
Of her companions, in the jewellery  
And feminine apparel was now dressed,  
Which the Maganzan in his treachery  
Intended for Lanfusa; so from crest  
To spurs, Marfisa doffed her arms, though she  
Was rarely seen without them, and arrayed  
Herself, to please the others, as a maid.

70

As soon as Mandricard set eyes on her,  
He planned, with overweening confidence  
(For, in his view, she and his lady were  
A fair exchange), that he would recompense  
The Sarzan monarch and to him transfer  
This damsel, having first removed her hence:  
If Love, he thought, arranges matters thus,  
The African will not lament his loss.

71

So Mandricardo, scheming to provide  
His rival with the damsel who appears  
As comely as the lady at his side  
(Whom he desired to keep), the cavaliers,  
Whom he approached, now formally defied,  
Claiming the lovely maid as his, not theirs,  
And, challenging them all to joust with him,  
He called them forth to battle fierce and grim.

72

The brothers, who had kept their armour on,  
To guard the company from all affray,  
Ready and eager, had at once begun  
To move to the attack, believing they  
Were challenged by both knights; but of these, one  
Remained immobile, nor in any way  
Gave sign of joining in this joust; and so  
Two combatants opposed a single foe.

73

Viviano moved towards him with high heart,  
His heavy lance couched low; towards *him* came  
The Tartar king, whose prowess in the art  
Of combat earned for him undying fame.  
Each seeks to strike the other in the part  
Which least can stand the blow. Viviano's aim  
At Mandricardo's helmet fails to make  
Him fall: he is not even seen to shake.

74

But Mandricard, who has a stronger spear,  
Shatters Viviano's shield as it were glass,  
And from the saddle sends him flying clear,  
To land among the flowers and the grass.  
Then Malagigi spurs his destrier,  
His brother's setback eager to redress.  
He goes to keep his brother company  
The sooner, sharing his indignity.

75

Next, Aldigiero, having quickly put  
His armour on, was mounted on his steed,  
Not waiting for his cousin, and full out  
Rode off against the pagan; at top speed  
He struck the helmet in the centre, not  
An inch below the sights, and yet no heed  
Does Mandricardo pay, while to the sky  
Four fragments of the shattered weapon fly.

## 76

The pagan struck him now upon the left.  
The weapon's impact was so violent  
That Aldigiero's shield in two was cleft,  
And his cuirass as much protection lent  
As plaited straw, or bark; the cruel shaft  
Through Aldigiero's snowy shoulder went;  
Amid the grass and flowers fell the knight,  
His armour gory red, his visage white.

## 77

With daring, Ricciardetto follows on.  
He couches, as he comes, a mighty lance,  
Showing once more, as he has often shown,  
He is a worthy paladin of France.  
As though the conflict were already won,  
He gallops onward, but by some mischance  
His charger falls and Ricciardetto is  
At once unhorsed, though by no fault of his.

## 78

Then, since there is no other cavalier,  
The pagan thinks that he has won the joust,  
And to the fountain goes to claim the fair  
Young damsel, and he says: 'Lady, you must  
Concede that you are ours, since it is clear  
No one is left to champion you. I trust  
You'll not demur or make excuses, for  
This custom has been long observed in war.'

## 79

Raising a haughty face, Marfisa said,  
'The premisses of your remarks are wrong.  
Right would be on your side, I will concede,  
And you could justly claim me, if among  
These cavaliers, who on the ground lie spread,  
Were one who is my lord; but I belong  
To no one but myself; and so you see,  
Who wants me must do battle first with me.

## 80

'A buckler and a lance I too can wield  
And many a cavalier I have unhorsed.'  
Then to the squires she said, 'Bring me my shield,  
Bring me my arms and steed.' Away they coursed.  
Stripped to her doublet soon she stood revealed.  
Save for her visage, valour, reinforced  
By combat and the hardihood of wars,  
Had formed in her a replica of Mars.

## 81

When she was armed, she girded on her sword  
And lightly leapt upon her destrier.  
Putting him through his paces on the sward,  
She rode him three times round, now here, now there.  
And then with many a defiant word,  
Aiming her lance, a gallant challenger,  
Against the Tartar king she galloped on,  
Bold as the Troy-defending Amazon.

## 82

Then both their lances to the very butt,  
At that first, fierce encounter, broke like glass.  
Yet neither foe had yielded by one jot,  
Nor did they sit their steeds upright the less.  
Marfisa, eager to discover what  
The pagan's prowess is, resolves to pass  
To combat at close range and *corps à corps*;  
So, sword in hand, she faces him once more.

## 83

Cursing the heavens and the elements,  
The pagan raged to see her still upright;  
She too blasphemed with no less violence  
To see his shield intact; the chilling sight  
Of naked steel each cavalier presents.  
In turn, the blades the magic armour smite  
In which both combatants that day are clad,  
And greater need of it they'd never had.

## 84

Enchanted armour nothing can assail,  
 No sword can penetrate, no lance can pierce.  
 They could prolong the fight to no avail  
 That day and all the next, from dawn to tierce.  
 But Rodomonte now begins to rail.  
 Flinging himself between them, proud and fierce,  
 He shouts: 'If you are eager for a fray,  
 Let us conclude our fight begun today.

## 85

'We called a truce, do not forget, and made  
 A pact to bring assistance to our side.  
 No other battle, till we lend such aid,  
 Should be begun, no other foe defied.'  
 Then, bowing to Marfisa, he displayed  
 The message they received, and does not hide  
 The story of the courier who came  
 To ask their help in Agramante's name.

## 86

He asked her then if she would please defer  
 The inconclusive combat here begun,  
 And without more ado invited her  
 To fight with them for King Troiano's son:  
 This is a nobler cause and worthier,  
 For which there's greater glory to be won,  
 Than in a quarrel of no consequence  
 Which such heroic enterprise prevents.

## 87

Marfisa, ever eager to contend  
 Against the knights of Charlemagne with lance  
 And sword, and having had no other end  
 When from so far away she came to France  
 Than to observe their valour at first hand,  
 Hearing the pagan's words, jumped at the chance  
 Of helping Agramante in his need,  
 And with the plan she readily agreed.

## 88

Ruggiero in the meantime has in vain  
 Followed Ippalca on the mountain route,  
 For when they reach the summit it is plain  
 That Rodomont, of whom they're in pursuit,  
 Has gone the other way; so once again  
 Ruggiero turns, and at a spanking trot,  
 Knowing the miscreant has not gone far,  
 Reaches the fountain where the others are.

## 89

But first Ippalca he has wisely sent  
 To Montalbano, a distance of one day;  
 For, had she come with him, this would have meant  
 An even longer journey and delay.  
 He bids her be of cheer and not lament.  
 He'll win Frontino back and in some way  
 Get word to her, wherever she may be,  
 That she may hear the tidings speedily.

## 90

He gives to her the letter which he wrote  
 In Agrismonte and has ever since  
 Kept hidden in a fold inside his coat.  
 Ippalca on her memory imprints  
 His word-of-mouth additions to the note.  
 The loyal messenger no effort stints.  
 Without a moment's pause she gallops on  
 And comes, when evening falls, to Montalban.

## 91

Along a well-marked trail Ruggiero chased  
 His quarry; not until he reached the fount  
 Did he catch up with him for all his haste.  
 And there he saw him on the stolen mount.  
 The Tartar had just promised not to waste  
 More time - an oath confirmed by Rodomont:  
 They'd perpetrate no further hostile ploy,  
 But save the camp which Charles's troops annoy.

92

Ruggiero knew Frontino, and thus knew  
 Who the thief was who sat his horse astride.  
 Over his lance his shoulders rounded grew,  
 As loudly he the African defied,  
 Who showed more patience than than Job could do;  
 For in response he quelled his mighty pride,  
 Refusing this new challenge, he who fought  
 So willingly and ever battle sought.

93

This was the first and last occasion when  
 The monarch of Algiers refused a fight;  
 But Agramante now needs all his men  
 And Rodomont acknowledges his right  
 To summon aid; and if Ruggiero then  
 Were at his mercy like a hare held tight  
 Between a leopard's paws he would not so  
 Delay as to inflict a single blow.

94

To add to this, the Sarzan is aware  
 This is Ruggiero come to claim his steed,  
 The one whose valour he would gladly dare,  
 And whose renown all warriors concede,  
 Whose feats are celebrated everywhere.  
 He longs to test his mettle and his breed,  
 Yet he refuses – an amazing thing –  
 So greatly he prefers to aid his king.

95

A thousand miles and more he would have gone  
 For such a fight, had this not been the case;  
 Yet nothing else that day would he have done,  
 Were it Achilles in Ruggiero's place.  
 Of all the many sparks which flew, not one  
 Caught fire and of a flame there was no trace.  
 He tells Ruggiero why he will not fight  
 And begs him aid their monarch in his plight.

96

For as a loyal cavalier he must  
 Defend his lord and rally to his side;  
 Let them conclude their duel when this trust  
 Has been fulfilled. Ruggiero then replied:  
 'I am quite willing to defer our joust  
 Until the Frankish king has been defied  
 And from his clutches Agramant is free,  
 If first Frontino is restored to me.

97

'That you have greatly erred I'll prove by force  
 Of arms; it ill became you as a knight  
 To rob a gentle maiden of my horse.  
 But if you wish me to defer our fight,  
 Dismount Frontino; it will be the worse  
 For you unless you yield me up my right.  
 For then no earthly power will induce  
 Me to delay, nor grant you one hour's truce.'

98

So these, then, are the terms Ruggiero makes:  
 Frontino, or a combat then and there.  
 While Rodomonte neither offer takes,  
 Unwilling yet to yield the destrier,  
 Or further to delay, for all their sakes,  
 The Tartar from the other side draws near  
 And on Ruggiero's banner sees the bird  
 On whose account new conflict now is stirred.

99

An eagle, argent, on an azure field  
 Ruggiero bore, the noble Trojan sign,  
 Being descended, as I have revealed,  
 From mighty Hector and his royal line.  
 This fact from Mandricardo was concealed,  
 And, not permitting that this bird divine  
 Should be by any other knight displayed,  
 A challenge to the newcomer he made.



100

He also bore upon his shield the bird  
Which from Mount Ida snatched up Ganymede.  
This shield on Mandricardo was conferred  
At Castle Perilous for a brave deed.  
I think, among the stories you have heard,  
You will remember how the fairy maid  
Gave him those weapons which Jove's armourer  
Had forged for Hector in the Trojan war.

101

These two, Ruggiero and the Tartar king,  
For this same cause had often fought before.  
How they had parted and gone wandering  
Is known to you: of that I'll say no more.  
And now their fates these knights together bring.  
Seeing again the shield Ruggiero bore,  
On all his strength and rage the Tartar drew,  
And to Ruggiero cried: 'I challenge you!

102

'That emblem which you rashly bear is mine,  
And this is not the first and only day  
That I have seen you flaunting that ensign  
Which still, despite my warnings, you display.  
Madman! no threats, it seems, can I combine  
To turn you from the folly of your way:  
I'll show you it were better to have paid  
Due heed to me, and my commands obeyed!'

103

As well-dried kindling quickly catches light  
At a small puff of wind, and leaps and flares,  
So now Ruggiero's angry pride burns bright  
As soon as Mandricard's first words he hears.  
'You think' (he said) 'because this other knight  
To pick a quarrel with me rashly dares,  
That I must yield? But I will take the two -  
Frontin from him and Hector's shield from you.

104

'I fought with you before, not long ago.  
And for this selfsame cause; I did not slay  
You then, for I would scorn to kill a foe  
Who has no sword, and you had none that day.  
Now let us pass to deeds (that was but show).  
For that white eagle you shall dearly pay.  
That emblem from my forebears I inherit.  
You have no right to it: I justly wear it.'

105

'You have usurped that emblem, which is mine!',  
The Tartar king retorted, and drew sword,  
The one which he had found beneath the pine  
With all Orlando's other weapons stored.  
Ruggiero's sense of honour is so fine,  
By him no rule of chivalry's ignored.  
Seeing the Tartar draw his sword, at once  
Upon the ground beneath he casts his lance.

106

Then, grasping Balisarda in his fist,  
His shield upon his arm he firmly takes.  
But Rodomonte plunges in their midst.  
A sudden dash Marfisa likewise makes.  
Each urges one opponent to desist  
And forces them apart, for all their sakes.  
The African in his complaint is loud:  
Twice Mandricardo broke the truce he vowed.

107

First, thinking he could win the maid as his,  
He'd stopped and jostled more than once; and now,  
To take away Ruggiero's emblem, he's  
Prepared once more to violate his vow:  
A poor concern for Agramante, this!  
'Let us conclude *our* fight: you will allow,'  
He said, 'if dilly-dally here you must,  
Our combat is more suitable and just.

108

'A truce was sworn between us and agreed,  
And our dispute must thus be settled first.  
When I have dealt with you, I shall proceed  
To answer him who in his folly durst  
Contest with me the right to mount this steed.  
Then for his shield, against him do your worst.  
But I shall give you so much work to do,  
Ruggiero will not find much left of you.'

109

'The part of me you think you can defeat',  
The Tartar king replied to Rodomont,  
'You'll not subdue; but I will make you sweat  
From head to foot and on this you can count.  
More than you bargain for in me you'll meet.  
Like water springing from a living fount,  
My strength will last me for a thousand fights,  
With you, Ruggiero and all other knights.'

110

Their anger mounted and the insults flew  
Now from the one, now from the other, side.  
King Mandricard would like to fight with two  
At once, so fierce he burns with rage and pride.  
Ruggiero, who is not accustomed to  
Endure abuse, will not be pacified.  
Alone Marfisa turns now here, now there;  
In vain she tries to calm each cavalier,

111

Just as a farmer, when a swollen stream,  
Topping its lofty banks, new outlet seeks,  
Will hasten where the rising waters seem  
To menace his green pastures, and there checks  
Their onrush, or where next they'll overbrim  
The hoped-for corn, he blocks and dams the leaks  
As best he can, and yet, for all he does,  
Elsewhere the water, ramifying, flows.

112

So, while Ruggiero, Mandricardo and  
Fierce Rodomonte are at odds, all three,  
Each being resolved to win the upper hand  
And show the others his supremacy,  
Marfisa does her best to gain command.  
Yet all her efforts end but fruitlessly:  
If one of them she does at last restrain,  
She sees the other two begin again.

113

'Brave knights,' Marfisa said, hoping to bring  
Them to agreement, 'heed my words, I pray:  
Defer all single combat till our king  
Is out of danger; and if then for fray  
Among yourselves you are still hungering,  
Let us resume our fights begun today.  
With Mandricard my combat I'll renew,  
To test his boast and see the matter through.

114

'But if King Agramante needs our aid,  
Let him *be* aided and our strife deferred.'  
'I'm willing to depart', Ruggiero said,  
'When I regain my charger; in a word,  
Either this thief surrenders me my steed,  
Or else I claim it back with lance and sword;  
Either I die in combat *sur-le-champ*,  
Or else I ride Frontino back to camp.'

115

And Rodomonte answered, 'To obtain  
The second of your two alternatives  
Will be less easy than the first to gain.'  
And he continued, 'If our king receives  
Insult or injury, it will be plain  
The fault is yours, not mine.' This protest gives  
Ruggiero not a moment's pause; no heed  
He pays but grasps his sword and spurs his steed.

## 116

And with the impetus of a wild boar  
 He hurls himself against his enemy,  
 With shield and shoulder battering the Moor,  
 Who slips his stirrup, so put out is he.  
 The Tartar shouts, 'Defer this battle or  
 You'll have to settle your account with me.'  
 Dishonourably, even as he spoke,  
 He dealt Ruggiero's helm a cruel stroke.

## 117

This bows Ruggiero to his charger's neck  
 And when he tries to raise himself upright,  
 The blows of Rodomonte serve to check  
 All his attempts; such deadly onslaughts might  
 Have cleft his helmet, splitting cheek from cheek,  
 But, adamantine, it protects the knight.  
 Ruggiero in dismay flings both hands wide.  
 The rein hangs loose, his sword falls at his side.

## 118

The charger bears him off, and on the ground  
 His Balisarda lies. She who that day  
 Companionship with him in arms has found,  
 Watches with burning wrath the ignoble way  
 Against one, two in enmity are bound.  
 Since she is valorous and brave, straightway  
 Against the Tartar she directs her horse  
 And strikes him on the head with all her force.

## 119

After Ruggiero Rodomonte speeds:  
 Another blow will make Frontino his.  
 But Vivian and Richard place their steeds  
 Between the two and check hostilities.  
 One hurtles Rodomonte and succeeds  
 In blocking him from where Ruggiero is.  
 The other, Viviano, hands his sword  
 To his good friend, Ruggiero, now restored.

## 120

Soon as Ruggiero to himself returns  
 And in his hand finds Viviano's blade,  
 Eager for vengeance, all delay he scorns  
 And on his foe he rushes unafraid,  
 As when a lion, tossed on a bull's horns,  
 Feeling no pain, is driven, undismayed,  
 By frenzied rage to re-attack in haste,  
 The quicker its desired revenge to taste.

## 121

A rain of blows on Rodomonte's head  
 Ruggiero strikes, and if he had the sword  
 Which by a breach of honour, as I said,  
 He was obliged to drop upon the sward,  
 I do not think, if I am not misled,  
 That helmet much protection would afford,  
 Though for the king of Babel it was fired  
 When to wage war with heaven he aspired.

## 122

Dame Discord, thinking nothing could reduce  
 The strife and turmoil which had broken out,  
 Seeing no prospect of a peace or truce,  
 Assured her sister they need have no doubt:  
 Their work being done, their bonds they now might  
 And to their monks, so pious and devout, [loose,  
 Return; so let them now depart; we'll stay  
 And watch the progress of the bitter fray.

## 123

Ruggiero hit the other with such force  
 Upon the brow, that Rodomonte struck,  
 With back and helm, the cruppers of his horse.  
 From side to side, three and four times he shook,  
 Dangling head down; and in the frantic course  
 Which, uncontrolled, the startled charger took,  
 He would have lost his sword, had not a twist  
 Of leather tied it firmly to his wrist.

124

Meanwhile Marfisa makes the Tartar sweat.  
 He also for his part so shrewdly hits  
 That she, like him, pours like a rivulet.  
 The hauberk of each one so closely fits  
 That through no chink can either's weapon get,  
 Thus in their duel so far they are quits;  
 But at a sudden turn made by her steed,  
 Marfisa of Ruggiero's help has need.

125

The charger of Marfisa, making a swift  
 Leap sideways where the grass was soft and moist,  
 Slipped and went down; straightway it strove to lift  
 Its heavy bulk, which was no sooner hoist  
 Than Brigliadoro hurtled from the left  
 (The steed in which Orlando once rejoiced),  
 Spurred by the Tartar with a total lack  
 Of honour, and Marfisa's horse fell back.

126

Ruggiero, when he sees the damsel lie  
 Thus disadvantaged, help does not defer.  
 His foe being stunned, there is no reason why,  
 Since he is free, he should not rescue her.  
 He strikes the Tartar's helm a blow whereby,  
 If but that sword his Balisarda were,  
 That head he'd sever like an apple core,  
 If Mandricard another helmet wore.

127

And in the meantime the Algerian king  
 Comes to himself once more and gazes round.  
 He sees young Richard and, remembering  
 How he had helped Ruggiero hold his ground,  
 He makes for him, a harsh reward to bring  
 For his brave deed; but Malagigi found,  
 With his great skill and using a strange spell,  
 A means by which the pagan's wrath to quell.

128

For Malagigi knew the secret art.  
 Compared with any other sorcerer,  
 He was no less accomplished and expert.  
 And though his book of magic was not there,  
 He had the special formula by heart  
 Whence by long usage demons conjured were.  
 He sends one into Doralice's horse  
 Which drives it forward on a frenzied course.

129

Into the body of that humble hack  
 Which bore the daughter of King Stordilan  
 Upon its docile, uncomplaining back,  
 The sorcerer (brother to Vivian)  
 By words alone sent one of Minos' black  
 Angels; the nag, which never walked or ran  
 Unless encouraged, leapt into the air  
 Sixteen feet high and thirty long, I swear.

130

The leap was high and wide, yet it was not  
 The kind to make a rider lose his seat.  
 Thus flying in mid-air, the damsel thought  
 That her last moment she would surely meet,  
 And in great fear began to call and shout.  
 The nag, just as the devil urges it,  
 After a second leap runs off so fast  
 The speed of every arrow is surpassed.

131

And from the combat Ulieno's son  
 Withdrew at the first sound of that loved voice,  
 And where the palfrey bore his lady on  
 He raced to rescue her; and the same choice  
 The Tartar made, and straightway he was gone;  
 Without requesting either peace or truce  
 Of either foe, he chases Rodomont  
 And Doralice on her frenzied mount.

132

Meanwhile Marfisa rose from where she lay,  
 Burning with wrath and rage and ire and scorn.  
 She longs for vengeance but too far away  
 She sadly sees her enemy is borne.  
 Ruggiero at such ending of the fray  
 As lions roar in rage (not when they mourn)  
 Bellows in fury, for he knows indeed  
 They cannot now catch up with either steed.

133

Ruggiero, far from willing yet to cease,  
 The matter of his charger still contests.  
 Marfisa does not want to leave in peace  
 The Tartar till she further probes and tests  
 The limits of his skill and expertise:  
 To leave such things unsettled, each protests,  
 Would be a grievous breach of chivalry,  
 And so to follow them they both agree.

134

In Paris they decide to seek them out  
 (If they should fail to come upon them first),  
 For there they will have gone without a doubt,  
 Where Charlemagne prepares to do his worst,  
 By putting all the Saracens to rout;  
 And so to satisfy their unquenched thirst  
 For vengeance, they resolve to leave straightway.  
 But now Ruggiero, his farewells to say,

135

His horse's head has turned where to one side  
 The brother of his lovely lady waits.  
 He vows they shall be friends, whate'er betide,  
 No matter what shall be their several fates.  
 Then in his name (and this no harm implied)  
 Remembrance to his sister he entreats.  
 This part he did so well and with such tact  
 That Ricciardetto nothing could suspect.

136

Of him, of Malagigi, Vivian,  
 Of wounded Aldigier, his leave he takes.  
 All of them proffered friendship, every man,  
 For all that he had done for all their sakes.  
 Marfisa, to defend the Saracen,  
 For Paris her departure quickly makes,  
 Without farewells; the brothers wave goodbye,  
 But cannot catch her up for all they try.

137

And Ricciardetto too went on his way,  
 While stricken Aldigiero tarried there;  
 Against his will he was obliged to stay.  
 Then, taking the same path as the first pair,  
 The two remaining followed on that day.  
 My lord, in my next canto you shall hear  
 What superhuman deeds against Charlemagne  
 Those four achieved, whose marvels I'll make plain.

But all at once they heard a piteous wail  
 Which stopped the comrades in their tracks, all three.  
 It seemed to echo from a near-by vale;  
 The timbre of the tones was womanly.  
 But now I wish to interrupt this tale  
 And in this wish of mine please bear with me,  
 For better things I promise you next time,  
 If you will hear what follows in my rhyme.

## CANTO XXXVII

## I

As to perfect some precious gift or bent  
 Which Nature without toil cannot bestow,  
 Women have laboured, day and night intent,  
 And well-earned recognition sometimes know,  
 Would that they chose to be as diligent  
 And a like dedicated care would show  
 In studies more esteemed and highly prized,  
 Whence mortal virtues are immortalized.

## 2

And would they might their powers then devote  
 To women's own commemorative praise,  
 Rather than look to men to sound this note,  
 Whose envious spite their judgement overlays,  
 For Woman's merits many a man will not  
 Proclaim, though gladly ill of her he says,  
 By women, women's fame could reach the skies,  
 Higher perhaps than men's renown could rise.

## 3

And often men are not content to sing  
 In praise of each the other's world renown,  
 But all their efforts they apply to bring  
 To light why purists should on women frown.  
 Unwilling they should rise in anything,  
 They do the best they can to keep them down  
 (I speak here of the past), as if the fame  
 Of women would dissolve or dim *their* name.



4

And yet no powers of the hand or tongue,  
 'Transformed to voice or words upon the page  
 (Though ill-repute be magnified among  
 All men, and virtue by an envious gauge  
 Be minished), could contrive to leave unsung  
*All* women's merits, for despite the rage  
 Of male detractors, some are known about,  
 Although the greater part are blotted out.

5

Harpalyce, Tomyris and the maid  
 Who fought by Turnus, Hector's Amazon,  
 She whom the men of Tyre and Sidon made  
 Their leader and to Libya sailed on,  
 Zenobia and she who, unafraid,  
 Assyria, Persia, India warred upon,  
 These women warriors are but a few  
 Whose fame the chronicles of war renew.

6

And women, wise and strong and true and chaste,  
 In other regions than in Greece and Rome,  
 Wherever the sun shines, from the Far East  
 To the Hesperides, have had their home,  
 Whose virtues and whose merits are unguessed.  
 Concerning them historians are dumb:  
 Contemporary authors, filled with spite,  
 The truth about such women would not write.

7

But, ladies, do not cease on this account  
 To persevere in works which you do well.  
 Let not discouragement ambition daunt,  
 Nor fear that recognition never will  
 Be yours. Good no immunity can vaunt  
 From change, Evil is not immutable,  
 And if in history your page was blurred,  
 In modern times your merits will be heard.

8

Marullo and Pontano championed you;  
 Both Strozzi: first the father, then the son;  
 Now Bembo and Cappello pay their due,  
 And he who formed the courtier's paragon,  
 And Luigi Alamanni and the two  
 Beloved of Mars and of the Muses, one  
 And the other equally, both of the blood  
 Which rules the town which stems the Mincio's flood.

9

One of these two, whose natural desire  
 Is to pay honour to your excellence,  
 Up to Parnassus, Cynthus, even higher,  
 His praises of you offers, like incense;  
 But more: the love, the faith, in spite of dire  
 Afflictions and of menacing events,  
 His Isabella's courage which abjures  
 Defeat, have made him, not his own, but yours.

10

And so he never wearies of the theme  
 Of lauding you in his enduring songs.  
 If some speak ill, you can depend on him  
 To take up arms at once and right your wrongs.  
 He holds his life but little in esteem  
 Compared with giving praise where praise belongs.  
 He is himself a theme of eloquence,  
 For he gives fame to others' excellence.

11

And it is fit that one so well endowed  
 With virtue that she seems to comprehend  
 All goodness that on women is bestowed,  
 From wifely constancy should never bend,  
 But like a column has unswerving stood,  
 Whatever shocks or ill the Fates might send.  
 He deserves her, and she deserves him too;  
 No pair was better coupled than these two.

12

New trophies he has brought to Oglio's shore,  
 Composing many a well-turned line of verse  
 Amid the clamour and the clash of war,  
 Which envy on the near-by Mincio stirs.  
 Ercole Bentivoglio's praises soar  
 In celebration of you to the spheres.  
 Trivulzio and Guidetto cannot fault you,  
 Nor Molza, named by Phoebus to exalt you.

13

And Ercole, the duke of Chartres, the son  
 Of my Alfonso, spreads his mighty wings  
 And, not unlike the legendary swan,  
 Flying, your praises to the heavens sings.  
 My lord of Vasto, whose exploits alone  
 Would furnish Rome's and Athens' chronicling  
 A thousand times, shows it is now his will  
 To render you immortal with his quill.

14

Besides all these who champion you today  
 And many more who praise you lavishly,  
 You to yourselves could equal homage pay;  
 For many women leave embroidery  
 To seek the Muses and their thirst allay  
 At Aganippe's fount; and then we see  
 That greater is our need of words of yours  
 Than you have need of any words of ours.

15

And if a good account I were to give,  
 And fully to such women's worth attest,  
 I'd fill so many pages, I believe,  
 This canto would be nothing but a list.  
 And if I were to choose, say, six, or five,  
 I might offend and anger all the rest.  
 How shall I solve the problem? Speak of none?  
 Or choose among so many only one?

16

I will choose one and she whom I will name  
 No envious disdain or scorn will stir.  
 No other women will be put to shame  
 If I omit them all and praise but her.  
 Not only has she won immortal fame  
 With her sweet style - no sweeter do I hear;  
 To him of whom she speaks or writes, she gives  
 New life: awakened from the tomb, he lives.

17

As Phoebus his fair sister, pure and white,  
 Gazing upon her, renders fairer still  
 Than Venus, Mercury or other light  
 Which circles with the heavens, or at will:  
 So into her I speak of, more insight  
 And sweeter eloquence he breathes to fill  
 Her lofty-sounding words with such *élan*  
 That in our heavens shines a second sun.

18

She is Vittoria and justly crowned,  
 As one to victory and triumph born.  
 Where'er she walks, the laurel-leaves abound  
 And diadems of fame her brow adorn.  
 Like Artemisia, lauded and renowned,  
 Who her Mausolus never ceased to mourn,  
 She is a yet more pious, loving wife:  
 She gives her spouse not burial, but life.

19

If Laodamia and if Brutus' spouse,  
 Evadne, Arria, Argia and many more  
 Were praised, and praised deservedly, because  
 Each wished to share her husband's sepulchre,  
 What greater marvel does that wife arouse  
 Who draws from Lethe and the ninefold shore  
 Of Styx her consort back to life and breath  
 Despite the Fates and in despite of Death!

20

If fierce Achilles envy in the breast  
Of Alexander stirred for deeds proclaimed  
By the Maeonian poet's epic blast,  
Then all the more would you, by all acclaimed,  
Francesco di Pescara, by your chaste  
And loving wife, rightly for ever famed!  
By her your glory echoes ever higher.  
No more resounding peal could you desire.

21

If everything that might be said of her,  
And all I wish to say, I'd here unfold,  
I'd cover many pages, I aver,  
Yet much would even so remain untold.  
And of Marfisa who is waiting there  
With her two comrades, resolute and bold,  
The story which I promised to pursue  
Would have to be deferred today anew.

22

So now, since you have come to hear my tale,  
And not to break the promise I have made,  
At greater leisure I'll myself regale  
With all the praise of her I would have said;  
Not that I think my lines are of avail  
To her whose vein such richness has displayed,  
But for the need I feel to honour her  
Whose genius I acknowledge and revere.

23

So, ladies, I conclude: in every age  
There have been women worthy of renown;  
But envious writers have left blank the page  
Which after death should make your glory known.  
This will no longer be: you must engage  
To make yourselves immortal from now on.  
Had the two sisters been aware of this,  
They had been sooner friends than enemies.

24

I speak of Bradamante and the twin  
Of her Ruggiero; their brave deeds I strive  
To bring to light, though nine times out of ten  
The facts are missing; yet I will revive  
The memory of such as still remain.  
For noble acts which men to hide contrive  
Should be revealed; also in token of  
My wish to please you, ladies, whom I love.

25

Ruggiero, as I said, was just about  
To leave and had already bid goodbye  
And from the tree had pulled his weapon out  
(And no one now opposed him), when a cry  
Arrested him and held them all in doubt.  
Not far away it sounded but near by;  
And, with Marfisa and his bride, he made  
Towards the sound, if need be to lend aid.

26

Forward they rode and louder grew the sound,  
Until at last the words were audible.  
Reaching the vale, three women there they found  
Whose plight indeed was strange and terrible.  
Shrill cries they uttered, seated on the ground,  
For cut short up to the umbilical  
Their skirts had been; to hide herself each tries  
As best she can and, sitting, dares not rise.

27

And like the son of Vulcan who from dust  
Came forth to life, not from a mother's womb,  
By Pallas to Aglauros as a trust  
Committed (and he his serpent feet from  
Her keen eyes concealed, sitting with legs crossed  
Beneath him on the quadriga which some  
Have said he first constructed), even so  
These three their secret parts tried not to show.

28

This monstrous and dishonourable sight  
To two brave warriors' cheeks is seen to bring  
An altered hue, as vivid and as bright  
As a red rose in Paestum in the Spring;  
And Bradamante recognizes, quite  
Beyond all doubt (but greatly wondering),  
Ullania, whom she had met by chance,  
The queen of Iceland's messenger to France.

29

She recognized no less the other two,  
For at Ullania's side they always were;  
But she addresses her enquiry to  
The one whom she most honours, asking her  
Who was the miscreant who had been so  
Devoid of decency as to lay bare  
Those secrets, by all casual passers eyed,  
Which Nature, it would seem, prefers to hide.

30

Ullania has recognized the Maid,  
By her insignia and by her speech  
For she recalls her as the one who had  
Some little time ago unseated each  
Of the three kings; now in reply she said  
That at a castle, within easy reach,  
The evil folk not only cut her skirt,  
But beat her too, and did her other hurt.

31

What happened to the shield she cannot say,  
Nor how the kings had fared who by her side  
Had travelled many a land for many a day.  
They might be prisoners, they might have died.  
Although on foot, she chose to come this way,  
Hoping to be avenged if she applied  
For help to Charlemagne to right the wrong;  
She judged he would not suffer it for long.

32

From the three faces of the cavaliers,  
Whose bosoms no less tender are than brave,  
Serenity has vanished: wrath appears.  
When they have seen and heard how vile and grave  
An injury her ladies' was and hers,  
Their other obligations they now waive;  
She has no further need to plead her case:  
They gallop off at once towards the place.

33

With one accord they drew their surcoats off,  
Stirred by the deep compassion in their hearts.  
These garments, as it proved, were long enough  
To cover the poor women's shameful parts.  
The Maid, to spare Ullania the rough  
Uneven path and further pain and smarts,  
Takes her up pillion on her destrier.  
Marfisa follows suit, so does Ruggier.

34

Ullania, on Bradamante's horse,  
Points out the shortest routes along the way,  
While Bradamante, for her part, assures  
Her charge that she will be avenged that day.  
They leave the valley for a winding course  
Which to a hill-top climbs, first now this way  
And then the other; long before they stopped  
For rest, the sun behind the sea had dropped.

35

They find a little hamlet perched on high.  
The path to it is steep and bleak and bare.  
Here they take lodging and are glad to try  
The supper, which is good but humble fare.  
They look about them and where'er they spy  
They see the inhabitants all women are,  
Some young, some old; no matter where they turn,  
In that vast crowd, no man do they discern.

36

Jason, I think, no greater marvel knew,  
When on the isle of Lemnos he set foot  
(Nor did the Argonauts, his faithful crew),  
And no one there but women saw, who put  
Their sons and brothers all to death, who slew  
Their husbands and their fathers, so that but  
One virile face was seen, than did Ruggier  
And his companions on arriving there.

37

The women warriors give orders soon  
That the three ladies should be brought attire.  
Three dresses are supplied, which they put on.  
If they lack style, they are at least entire.  
The good Ruggiero beckons to him one  
Among the women, wishing to enquire  
Where all the men are: not one can he spy;  
And she obliges, eager to reply.

38

'This, which to you is strange and marvellous,  
That all these women live here without men,  
Is an intolerable grief to us.  
Here we are banished to this wretched den.  
To make our exile more monotonous,  
Our fathers, husbands, sons, we know not when  
We'll see, whom we so love; and this divorce  
A tyrant has imposed on us by force.

39

'And from his kingdom, which not distant is  
Two leagues from us, the land where we were born,  
He drove us forth with many cruelties,  
First bitterly reviling us with scorn.  
Our men and us (alas!) he menaces  
With death by torture if to him are borne  
Reports that they have visited us here,  
Or we with love receive them, should they dare.

40

'Of women he is such a bitter foe,  
He cannot bear us near him, nor consent  
That any man should come near us, as though  
They might be poisoned by the female scent.  
We've seen the branches shed and twice regrow  
Their crowning glory since we here were sent,  
And still the tyrant rages in his wrath  
And no one curbs him on his frenzied path.

41

'His subjects feel for him the greatest fear  
That death itself could ever inculcate,  
For Nature to his spite beyond compare  
Has joined a giant size and strength so great,  
All others he surpasses in this sphere;  
Nor to his female *subjects* is this threat  
Confined; for to all women visitors  
This tyrant's hostile acts are even worse.

42

'So, if your honour and the honour of  
These ladies you escort are dear to you,  
It is to your advantage not to move  
Another step along the pathway to  
The castle of this tyrant who no love  
For women has, whose plan is to subdue  
By scorn and shame all those who there ascend  
Both men and women - to his evil end.

43

'This villain, Marganorre (thus is named  
The lord by whom we women are coerced),  
More Nero-like than Nero, or others famed  
For cruelty, more evil, more accurst,  
The blood of humans, like a beast untamed,  
Desires; for female blood a greater thirst  
He has; no wolf a lamb more relishes,  
Than he who every woman banishes.'

44

What drove the tyrant to this frenzied state  
 The women and Ruggiero long to know.  
 The tale in full they beg her to relate  
 Or, rather, back to the beginning go.  
 'This lord', said she, 'was always filled with hate  
 And always cruel, but he did not show  
 These vile propensities at first; the role  
 He played concealed the evil in his soul.

45

'While his two sons were yet alive, whose ways  
 To Marganorre's no resemblance bore  
 (They were as different as chalk and cheese),  
 For they were kind, enjoying nothing more  
 Than visitors and friends from overseas,  
 Good manners, courtly deeds were seen to flower,  
 And, though the king was parsimonious,  
 His sons could, if they wished, be generous.

46

'Ladies and cavaliers were formerly  
 So well received that each and every one  
 Rode off delighted with such courtesy  
 And by the two young men all hearts were won.  
 Both took the solemn vows of chivalry;  
 They kept their vigil side by side. The one  
 Cilandro was, the other youth was called  
 Tanacro; both were regal, gallant, bold.

47

'And they might always have been worthy of  
 Such praise and honour, but they both fell prey  
 To that desire we dignify as love;  
 And from the straight path wandering astray,  
 Through labyrinths of error now they move,  
 And all the good they did is straight away  
 Perverted to become its opposite,  
 As though some sickness had infected it.

48

'A cavalier arrived, as it befell,  
 From the Byzantine court, and in his train  
 There rode a lady who, as I heard tell,  
 Drew the admiring glances of all men.  
 So deep in love with her Cilandro fell,  
 So grievously he languished in his pain,  
 He thought that he would die if she departed  
 Leaving him unfulfilled and broken-hearted.

49

'Because entreaties would have borne no fruit,  
 His purpose was to capture her by force.  
 He armed and hid himself along the route  
 The two had chosen for their homeward course.  
 The frenzied passion which had taken root  
 Left him no time to think, and when the horse  
 Of the Greek cavalier he saw advance  
 He galloped to attack, lance against lance.

50

'He thought he would succeed at the first blow,  
 Winning both lady and the victory,  
 But the Greek knight, who knew a thing or two  
 About the art and skill of chivalry,  
 Shattered like glass the hauberk of his foe.  
 The tidings reached the father instantly,  
 Who, seeing he was dead, beside their great  
 And ancient forebears buried him in state.

51

'The welcome all received was not decreased,  
 The hospitality remained the same;  
 For no less affable to every guest  
 Tanacro was, who shared Cilandro's fame  
 For courtesy; but not a year had passed  
 When from afar a lord and lady came.  
 He was a gallant, handsome man, and she  
 Most beautiful and lovely was to see.

52

'And no less virtuous she was than fair  
 And truly worthy of all men's esteem.  
 Courage was in his blood, and bold and rare  
 Those rivals must have been who equalled him;  
 And it is just that those who greatly dare  
 Should win a coveted reward. His name  
 Olindro was, Baron of Lungavilla,  
 And she, the baroness, was called Drusilla.

53

'No less for her the young Tanacro burned  
 Than did Cilandro for the lovely Greek  
 When all his life to dust and ashes turned;  
 No less now than his brother did he seek  
 (So little from that precedent he learned)  
 The laws of hospitality to break  
 Rather than to this strange and new desire  
 Acknowledge his surrender, and expire.

54

'Having his brother's death before his eyes  
 And wary of Olindro's wrath, he planned  
 To take the lady from him in such guise  
 He'd have no fear of his avenging hand.  
 That virtue soon diminishes and dies  
 On which Tanacro stands, as on dry land,  
 Above the floods of vice which round him sweep,  
 In which his father flounders fathoms deep.

55

'So in the depths of night, without a sound,  
 Some miles away, he stationed twenty men  
 In grottoes which along the route are found,  
 Or where the cross-roads intersect; and then  
 Olindro's passage was cut off all round.  
 He could not forward move, nor back again.  
 That day the baron was deprived of wife  
 And, after a courageous stand, of life.

56

'Her husband slain, Tanacro captive led  
 The lovely baroness; she, bowed with grief,  
 Would not by any means be comforted,  
 But at his hands she begged for the relief  
 Of death; her one desire was to be dead.  
 She flung herself at last from a high cliff.  
 She did not die, but with a broken skull  
 She lingered, frail and bruised and sorrowful.

57

'Tanacro had no other way to bear  
 Her home than on a stretcher; and the best  
 Of medical attention, every care  
 He lavished on her, fearing death might wrest  
 This precious booty from him; they prepare  
 Meanwhile to celebrate the wedding feast:  
 The name of wife, Tanacro judged, was more  
 Acceptable to her than paramour.

58

'Tanacro had no other waking thought,  
 No other wish, no other care, no dream  
 But of possessing her; all else was naught.  
 He begged her to forgive, he took the blame,  
 But all in vain; the longer he besought,  
 The more he tried, the more she hated him  
 And stronger grew, with each and every breath,  
 Her fixed desire to bring about his death.

59

'Her hatred of him did not so erase  
 Her wits that she no longer understood  
 That cunning was essential in the case,  
 That her true feelings she must mask and hood.  
 While plotting secretly, she must efface  
 All outward tokens of her inward mood  
 And (though all she desired was to destroy him)  
 Show every sign of longing to enjoy him.



60

“Peace”, her face pretends; “vengeance”, her heart  
 And will no other purpose contemplate. [cries,  
 The ways and means that pass before her eyes  
 Seem good or bad or indeterminate;  
 At last it seems to her that if she dies  
 She will succeed, and eagerly this fate  
 She welcomes; how or for what better cause  
 Can she now die than to avenge her spouse?

61

‘She seems all joy and happiness, and feigns  
 The utmost longing for the wedding-day;  
 And it appears from all the evidence  
 That she is eager to avoid delay.  
 Before her looking-glass she prinks and preens.  
 Thoughts of Olindro now seem far away,  
 But she has one request: the marriage vows,  
 As in her land, must honour her dead spouse.

62

‘It was untrue, however, that the rite  
 Was in her land conducted as she said;  
 But since no other answer to her plight  
 She could devise, she told this lie instead,  
 Hoping by such a method to requite  
 The miscreant who struck her husband dead;  
 She wants the wedding to be held, she says,  
 According to her native country’s ways.

63

“A widow who remarries,” she pretends,  
 “Ere she becomes the wife of someone new,  
 Must first placate the soul whom she offends  
 By masses, which are celebrated to  
 Remit past scores; thus she must make amends  
 Before the dead man’s tomb; then, as is due,  
 At the conclusion of this offering,  
 The bridegroom on the bride bestows the ring.

64

“And meantime the officiating priest  
 Over a flask of wine will offer up  
 A holy prayer; when the wine is blessed,  
 He pours it from the flask into a cup  
 And hands it to the bride and groom to taste;  
 The bride must first receive the holy stoup  
 And be the first to lift it to her lips,  
 Before the bridegroom from it also sips.”

65

‘Tanacro does not see what this implies,  
 And if the rite does not involve delays  
 He offers no objection, he replies.  
 The wretch does not perceive that by such ways  
 She leads him to his death, nor realize  
 That for Olindro’s murder he thus pays;  
 And so intently he is fixed on one  
 Thing only, for all else his wits have flown.

66

‘Drusilla had with her an agèd maid  
 Who, having come to serve her, stayed to serve.  
 She called her to her and discreetly said,  
 Where none could overhear them or observe,  
 “Mix me a poison of the kind you’ve made  
 Before, such as all traitors well deserve,  
 And I will punish Marganorre’s son  
 For the foul villainy which he has done.

67

“I know a way to save myself and you:  
 I’ll tell you later; now do as I ask.”  
 The old and faithful serving-maid withdrew  
 And secretly performed her fearful task.  
 With a sweet wine from Candia the brew  
 Was stirred and mingled in a crystal flask  
 Which would do duty on the wedding-day;  
 And now there was no reason for delay.

68

'At the appointed hour, adorned with gems  
The bride arrived, dressed in a lovely gown.  
Olindro in the place of honour seems,  
His tomb raised on two columns; they intone  
The office of the mass with solemn hymns.  
The people flock to hear from court and town,  
And Marganorre, joyful just this once,  
Comes with his son and his companions.

69

'The rites were said for him who lay in state,  
The flask containing poisoned wine was blessed.  
The priest continued to officiate,  
Filling a golden cup, at her request.  
She drank as much as was appropriate  
And for her promised husband left the rest.  
With joyful face she handed him the cup:  
Tanacro drank it down to the last drop.

70

'Handing the chalice to the priest, he turns  
With joy to clasp his bride in his embrace.  
Her docile tenderness has gone: there burns  
Instead a wrathful passion in its place.  
Pushing him back, his fond advance she spurns  
With fury blazing in her eyes and face;  
And in an awesome voice and chilling tone  
She shouts: "Traitor, keep back, from me be gone!

71

"You think to take your joy of me, while I  
From you have tears and suffering and woe?  
These hands have done their work: you will now die.  
That wine was poisoned (what? you did not know?).  
Your execution is too mild and by  
A death too kind, alas!, you are brought low.  
What hangman's hands, what savage penalty  
In all the world could match your treachery?

72

"It grieves me that your death does not perfect  
My sacrifice; if I had managed it  
As I desired, there would be no defect;  
My act of vengeance would have been complete.  
May my beloved husband not reject  
My offering, but may he find it sweet.  
Unable to despatch you as I would,  
I've done for you the only way I could.

73

"The punishment I long to give you here  
I hope your soul will suffer, as is due,  
Among the dead and damned down yonder; there  
I'll take my fill of joy in watching you."  
Such were her words; with eyes no longer clear  
She looked above; then she began anew,  
Her face aglow with love: "Olindro, take  
This wifely offering for vengeance' sake;

74

"And pray that by the grace of our dear Lord  
I may ascend to you in Heaven today.  
If only souls who merit such reward  
May be admitted to His kingdom, say  
Against an evil monster I have warred  
And bring the spoils of battle to array  
His shrine; is there a more deserving deed  
Than to exterminate so vile a breed?"

75

'Together life and words came to a close.  
Her face in death was joyful and content  
That such a traitor she had punished thus,  
He who the life-blood of her spouse had spent.  
Whether he died before her, no one knows.  
I rather think he was the first who went.  
The poison sooner worked in him because  
His portion of the wine the greater was.

76

'When Marganorre sees his only son  
Collapse, when in his arms he lifeless lies,  
He, unprotected, through the breast is run  
By grief so sharp that he too almost dies.  
Two sons he had and now he is alone.  
Two women are to blame for their demise:  
One was the cause of death of the first brother,  
And one with her own hands destroyed the other.

77

'Love, pity, anger, grief and frenzied rage,  
Desire for death and for revenge as well  
In the bereaved and anguished father wage  
A conflict, as when wild winds lash and swell  
The sea; his pain unable to assuage,  
Drusilla's body, now insensible,  
Goaded and stung by burning spite he tries  
To desecrate and ravage where it lies.

78

'Just as a snake in vain the spike will bite  
Which, piercing it, has pinned it to the ground,  
Just as a mastiff vents its futile spite  
Upon a pebble with a snarling sound,  
Maddened by bestial rage or appetite,  
So Marganorre - worse than any hound  
Or snake - continues his assault upon  
That helpless body from which life has gone.

79

'Nothing induces him to hold his hand;  
Nothing his thirst for vengeance will allay.  
The church is tightly packed with women, and  
Not one of us he spares, but tries to slay  
Us all, slicing us with his cruel brand  
Just as a peasant scythes a field of hay.  
He slaughters thirty, then a hundred more  
He wounds, and leaves them lying in their gore.

80

'So feared is he by troops and servitors,  
No man dare raise a finger to his wrath.  
The women flee the church in headlong course.  
No villager but takes the homeward path.  
At last his impetus has spent its force.  
He quits the scene, leaving an aftermath  
Of death and lamentation down below,  
And to his fortress he consents to go.

81

'He yielded then (though still his rage was hot)  
To those who begged him not to kill us all;  
Perpetual exile was to be our lot.  
And that same day (there was no interval)  
He published a decree: all women out!  
Here was the boundary, and woe befall  
Whatever woman dared to show her face  
Nearer the castle than this dismal place.

82

'And thus it was that husbands from their wives  
Were separated, sons from mothers too.  
If any man to visit us contrives  
And Marganor gets wind of it, then woe  
To him! it will be strange if he survives.  
Such culprits die a cruel death and slow.  
And at the castle he has passed a law  
More dire than anyone e'er heard or saw.

83

'A woman who is captured in the dale  
(And some do venture there, I must confess)  
Is to be whipped and sent beyond the pale;  
But first, according to this law, her dress  
Is cut so high and short that none can fail  
To see what Nature hides and seemliness.  
If any on an armed escort relies,  
The law is even more severe: she dies.

84

'If any is escorted by a band  
Of cavaliers, before the dead sons' tombs  
She's dragged and sacrificed by his own hand.  
To ignominious restraint he dooms  
The knights, relieving them of horses and  
Their weapons, armour, retinue and grooms.  
This is within his power, for all around  
More than a thousand men-at-arms are found.

85

'And further, any knight whom he may spare  
(If it shall ever please him) lifelong hate  
For all the female sex is made to swear  
And on the holy wafer consecrate  
His vow; so if, in spite of all, you are  
Resolved to lose your lives, ride to the gate  
Where you will find this fiend at home, and see  
Which is the worse - his strength, or cruelty.'

86

Her words the women warriors incite  
First to such pity, then to so much ire,  
That if it had been day instead of night  
They would have left at once; but all retire  
To take their rest; and when Aurora's light  
Signals the stars to yield before their sire,  
The cavaliers rearm and on their steeds  
Remount, resolved to punish such vile deeds.

87

When they are ready to set off, the sound  
Of many hoofs is heard not far away  
Behind their backs; at this they all turn round  
And gaze into the valley; I should say  
About a stone's throw from the higher ground  
A company along a narrow way  
Progressed, twenty armed men, or thereabout;  
Some were on horseback, others were on foot.

88

And with them, mounted on a horse, they brought  
A woman; from her wrinkles you could guess  
That she was old; her aspect, you'd have thought,  
Suggests a felon taken to the place  
Of execution; though she was distraught,  
Though so much time has passed, her dress and face  
The village women recognize at once:  
It is Drusilla's servant, they pronounce:

89

That serving-wench who with her mistress stayed  
(When she was captured by the second son),  
To whom was then entrusted, as I said,  
The task of mixing poison; she'd not gone  
To church that day to see Drusilla wed:  
She feared the consequence of what she'd done;  
But from the village she escaped to where  
She hoped to live in safety, free from fear.

90

But Marganorre traced her through his spies  
And found that she had fled to Austria.  
Unceasingly he thought how to devise  
A plan to capture and to punish her:  
The gallows and the stake were in his eyes  
Too mild a penance for a poisoner.  
A baron who her safety had ensured  
Betrayed her, by rich spoils and offers lured.

91

He sent her all the way to Constance, bound  
Like merchandise upon a donkey's back.  
Since she was gagged, she could not make a sound,  
And none could see her hidden in a sack.  
Thence Marganorre's troops, who now surround  
Her, had received commands to bring her back  
By him in whom all mercy now is fled,  
Whose rage will not be spent till she is dead.

92

As the great river which from Viso flows,  
The nearer it descends towards the sea,  
And more and more to the Ticino owes,  
To Lambra, Adda and many a tributary,  
In swelling pride and spate of water grows,  
So does Ruggiero's anger rise when he  
Has heard the crimes of Marganor, and thus  
The women warriors wax furious.

93

Their hearts were so inflamed with wrath and hate  
Against the tyrant for his cruelties,  
Such crimes they were resolved to castigate,  
Despite the number of his troops; to seize  
And slay him quickly seemed too kind a fate,  
Unworthy of offences such as his.  
It will be better to prolong the throes  
So that no single pang unnoticed goes.

94

Their duty first is to the serving-maid,  
To save her from the fearful death she faces.  
With slackened reins and ready heels they aid  
Their eager steeds to show their fastest paces.  
No sharper onslaught has that cavalcade  
Experienced; each man for safety races.  
Lucky are those who leave behind their gear,  
Their shields, their armour and the prisoner.

95

As when a wolf, returning to his lair,  
Clenching between his jaws his helpless prey  
And confident no enemies are near,  
Sees all at once a hunter cross his way  
With all the pack, his booty drops in fear,  
And where the bush is thickest lopes away,  
So did those troops as speedily make off,  
Escaping from attack into the rough.

96

Arms and the woman thus abandoning,  
And of their horses a fair quantity  
(So as to speed their flight), themselves they fling  
From cliffs and grottoes, unrestrainedly.  
This to the others was a welcome thing.  
Of the unwanted horses they took three,  
For the three women who the day before  
Had made three other horses' cruppers sore.

97

Then with all haste their journey they pursue  
Towards that infamous and cruel peak.  
They want the servant to come with them too,  
As witness of the vengeance they will wreak.  
This the old creature is afraid to do,  
But finds it all in vain to shout and shriek;  
Ruggiero lifts her to Frontino's croup  
And with her thus behind him gallops up.

98

They reached the summit whence they saw below  
A large and thriving town; on every side  
It could be entered without hindrance; no  
Enclosing bastion or moat they spied.  
A crag rose in the midst, with lofty brow,  
And on its back a castle seemed to ride.  
Towards this eagerly the warriors rode,  
For this they knew was Marganor's abode.

99

When they have entered, men-at-arms who guard  
The entrance shut the outer fortress-gate.  
The exit too the warriors see is barred;  
And Marganorre, issuing in state,  
Surrounded by his chosen bodyguard  
Of horse and foot, for parley does not wait.  
Briefly and arrogantly he disclosed  
The cruel customs which he had imposed.

100

Marfisa had already formed a plan  
 With which Ruggiero and the Maid of France  
 Were in agreement: for reply she ran  
 Against him, but not lowering her lance,  
 Nor brandishing her famous sword; with an  
 Astounding force upon his helm she plants  
 Her fist; he scarcely can remain astraddle,  
 But droops insensible across his saddle.

101

At the same moment Bradamante spurs,  
 Nor does Ruggiero long inactive stay,  
 But with an impetus to equal hers  
 He runs his lance through six without delay,  
 Yet from its rest his weapon never stirs.  
 One paunch, two breasts, one neck, one head display  
 Its deadly thrusts; and in the sixth it snaps,  
 Piercing the coward's spine through to his paps.

102

As many as are touched but lightly by  
 Count Aymon's daughter's golden lance, she floors.  
 It seems a bolt, hurled from the burning sky,  
 As when the Thunderer against us wars.  
 The people scatter, some of them on high,  
 Some to the plain; some lock themselves indoors;  
 Some to the churches, others home are fled,  
 And in the square all who remain are dead.

103

Marfisa in the interval had bound  
 The tyrant with his hands behind his back.  
 Drusilla's maid had charge of him and found  
 That pleasure in this work she did not lack.  
 They plan to raze the city to the ground  
 And all the dwellings they will burn and sack  
 Unless the tyrant's laws are changed in haste  
 And by Marfisa's legal code replaced.

104

The people will accept without demur  
 Marfisa's rule; not only do they dread  
 That further penalties they may incur,  
 That she may go beyond what she has said,  
 But they fear Marganorre even more  
 And all the cruel laws which he has made;  
 But, like most subject peoples, those whom most  
 They hate they most obey, to their great cost:

105

So no man trusts his neighbour or his brother,  
 No man his thoughts of vengeance dare confide.  
 They let him exile one, and kill another,  
 One dispossess, rob one of rightful pride.  
 Though here the heart its anguish has to smother,  
 In Heaven its sufferings aloud are cried.  
 God's vengeance comes at last in recompense,  
 And punishment, though tardy, is immense.

106

And now that mob, seething with rage and hate,  
 Desired to be revenged on tyranny.  
 No man, the proverb says, will hesitate  
 To gather firewood from a fallen tree.  
 So let all rulers mark this tyrant's fate:  
 The fruit of evil deeds will evil be.  
 To see him punished for his sins gave joy  
 To great and small, to every man and boy.

107

Many whose sisters, daughters, mothers, wives  
 By Marganorre have been put to death,  
 No longer now in terror of their lives,  
 Run, hands uplifted, eager for his death.  
 A wonder it will be if he survives.  
 The trio save him for a different death:  
 They plan that he shall die by slow degrees,  
 As though by torture, rack and little-ease.

108

Into the hands of that old serving-wench  
 As naked as the day when he was born  
 They gave him, bound so tight that by no wrench  
 Could he break free; with all a woman's scorn  
 And hate she made him tingle in revenge  
 For all the suffering which she had borne,  
 Poking him mercilessly with a goad  
 Which someone handed to her from the road.

109

Ullania and both the damsels, who  
 Their shameful treatment never will forget,  
 Are actively engaged in vengeance too.  
 They, like the servant, have to square a debt.  
 Their strength gives out, but they begin anew  
 (For they are far from finished with him yet):  
 They stone and scratch and bite him for his sins,  
 Or prick and stick and needle him with pins.

110

As when a torrent, proud and swollen made  
 By heavy rain betimes or melting snows,  
 Uproots in a precipitous cascade  
 The rocks, the trees, the corn that riper grows;  
 But when its force is spent, a child can wade,  
 A woman step across it with dry shoes,  
 No longer now the raging flood which poured,  
 Shrunk to the trickle of a narrow ford:

111

So Marganorre, at whose very name  
 His subjects trembled, of his antlers shorn,  
 From being so proud has now become so tame  
 That even children hold him up to scorn  
 And tweak his beard and pull his hair in game.  
 So, leaving him on all sides pricked and torn,  
 Ruggiero, Bradamante and Marfise  
 Approach the summit where the castle is.

112

The garrison did not resist the three.  
 The castle with its costly furnishings  
 Was yielded up; a part relentlessly  
 They sacked and burned; but for her sufferings  
 They gave Ullania some finery.  
 They found the golden shield and the three kings  
 Imprisoned there; I think I told you how  
 They'd gone unarmed, on foot, to keep their vow.

113

Unseated by the Maid, that very day  
 All armour, arms and horses they forswore,  
 And with Ullania went on their way,  
 Whom they'd escorted from so far a shore.  
 And whether it was worse I cannot say,  
 That they in her defence no weapons bore:  
 She was thus unprotected, but the cost  
 Would have been heavy if the kings had lost.

114

She would have shared the other women's doom  
 Who with an escort came, and in a trice  
 Have been conducted to the brothers' tomb  
 And by their father slain in sacrifice.  
 Less terrible than dying, I presume,  
 It is to show those parts that are not nice;  
 And every shame is lessened and excused  
 If we can say that on us force was used.

115

Before the women warriors depart  
 All the inhabitants are called to swear  
 That wives henceforth shall take the leading part  
 In government; if anyone shall dare  
 To flout this law, he shall be made to smart.  
 To sum the matter up, just as elsewhere  
 Husbands are masters, here the wives shall be  
 By right invested with authority.



## 116

As well as this they had to promise more:  
Whoever here on foot or horseback came  
Must not admitted be by any door,  
No matter who they were or what their fame,  
Unless by God and all His Saints they swore  
(Or any god which has a better claim)  
To help all women in adversity  
And of their foes for ever foes to be.

## 117

And if they married late or married soon,  
Or if they stayed unmarried all their lives,  
The law would be the same for everyone:  
Subjection and obedience to wives.  
Marfisa would return before the sun  
Moved south, before the trees had shed their leaves,  
And if the law neglected then she found,  
She'd sack and burn the city to the ground.

## 118

Drusilla's corpse from the unhallowed pit  
Wherein it lay they lifted reverently,  
And with her husband's body buried it  
In a rich sepulchre, most fair to see.  
The serving-maid continued still to hit  
The back of Marganorre lustily.  
She longed to have the strength to use the spike  
Without a pause for rest, as she would like.

## 119

The sisters see a column in the square  
Which Marganorre's vile and infamous  
Decrees and legislation used to bear.  
But now these two, who are victorious,  
Append his helmet as a trophy there  
With his cuirass and shield (and hazardous  
It were to take them down). And under those,  
New laws are then inscribed, which they impose.

## 120

Marfisa waited till this work was done.  
The law the mason cut was the reverse  
Of what was once inscribed upon the stone,  
To women's ignominy, death or worse.  
Ullania remained when they had gone.  
She did not think that makeshift gown of hers  
Was suitable for court, and she desired  
To be once more appropriately attired.

## 121

She, left with Marganorre in her power,  
Fearing he might revert to his old ways  
If he escaped in an unguarded hour,  
No longer his deserved despatch delays,  
But makes him leap below from a high tower.  
No greater leap he'd made in all his days.  
But now I'll leave her and her *demoiselles*  
And of the ones who go towards Arles I'll tell.

## 122

All through that day, and on the next they race,  
Till after the third hour; at last they reach  
A branching of the path; this is the place  
Where they must say farewell; clasped each to each,  
Repeatedly the lovers re-embrace.  
They verify at length which path is which.  
The women ride towards the camp, Ruggier  
To Arles; and I will end my canto here.