

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric painting. The upper portion is dominated by deep blues and purples, suggesting a night sky or a storm. A bright, glowing yellow-green light emanates from the center-left, creating a sense of mystery and intensity. In the lower right, a figure is visible, possibly a woman, in a dark, shadowed area. The overall mood is dramatic and evocative.

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO

Orlando Furioso

A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION

Translated by David R. Slavitt

Orlando Furioso

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO

Orlando Furioso

A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION

David R. Slavitt

THE BELKNAP PRESS OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts, & London, England

2009

Chi mi darà la voce e le parole
convenienti a sì nobil soggetto?

for Janet

Copyright © 2009 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ariosto, Lodovico, 1474–1533.

[Orlando furioso. English]

Orlando furioso: a new verse translation /

Ludovico Ariosto; translated by David R. Slavitt.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-674-03535-5 (alk. paper)

I. Roland (Legendary character)—Romances.

I. Slavitt, David R., 1935— II. Title.

PQ4582.E5A38 2009

851'3—dc22

2009017829

Contents

Translator's Preface

vii

Introduction

by Charles S. Ross

ix

ORLANDO FURIOSO

Glossary of Names

659

Translator's Preface

IN THE EARLY RENAISSANCE, while the visual arts were traveling from Italy northward, there was also a reverse motion in which the telling of the tales of Charlemagne in the *Chanson de Roland* became popular in Italy. Luigi Pulci published *Morgante Maggiore* in 1482, and Matteo Maria Boiardo wrote two parts of *Orlando Innamorato*. (He died in 1494, with Part III only just started.) Ludovico Ariosto followed upon these two and published the first version of *Orlando Furioso* in 1516. The third and definitive edition, in 46 cantos, appeared in 1532, a year before Ariosto's death. It has been said that Ariosto took Boiardo's minuet and turned it into a symphony. It is one of the great monuments of Renaissance literature, inspiring Vivaldi (with *Orlando Furioso*), Haydn (with *Orlando Paladino*), and Handel (with *Rinaldo*, *Ariodante*, *Orlando*, and *Alcina*) as well as Edmund Spenser and Lord Byron, whose *Faerie Queene* and *Don Juan* are both enabled by Ariosto's poem and tributes to it.

What makes *Orlando Furioso* particularly appealing to the modern sensibility is its sense of fun, its self-consciousness, its attitude toward a series of already established characters from the English Arthurian poems and the French poems about Charlemagne and Roland. Ariosto's object is to have fun with this huge cast, with their characteristic scrapes and Perils-of-Pauline escapes, but also to find ways of making relevant observations about the trials of life and the ways in which stylistic conventions (courtly love, primarily) form our ideas and our behavior. It is also a great show-off piece, with its *ottava rima* stanzas that are easier in Italian than in English—but I do them anyway, because in English one can have rhymes that are more startling and impish than in Italian, as Byron shows us. This seems to me altogether in consonance with the spirit of the piece.

The great lesson this work can have for students, and the one that they probably need more than any other, is that poetry can be fun. Of all the “great works” of the Renaissance, this is certainly the most enjoyable—the greatest cock-and-bull story in literature, but dazzlingly accomplished and endearing. It was Italo Calvino’s favorite book; as Cesare Pavese observed, there is virtually nothing in Calvino’s work that is not redolent of a *sapore Ariostense*. Or, putting it quite another way, it is very long and if I hadn’t loved it, I wouldn’t have knocked myself out for years bringing it into English in what I take to be its original playfulness.

There are other English versions. The best is that of Sir John Harrington, whose mother, Ethelreda, was an illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII. Sir John, a godson of Queen Elizabeth, is best known for having invented the flush toilet. Apparently he annoyed the queen, who could have banished him for life but, in a friendlier way, sent him off to translate *Orlando Furioso*, saying that he could return to court when the job was finished. She never expected to see him again. But he actually completed most of it, and his version is lively and witty, although not easy to get hold of. It is also rather . . . Elizabethan. More recently William Stewart Rose, a friend of Sir Walter Scott, did a much too romantic and respectful version that lapses, often, into Scottish. Guido Waldman and Allan Gilbert have versions in prose that are handy as trots but are not the poem. They were both useful to me, but are of no conceivable interest to a reader unless he or she is working along with the Italian text. Finally, there is a version in verse by Barbara Reynolds, but it isn’t funny enough, or sprightly enough. Ariosto’s poem is often outrageous, sometimes serious, but often quite silly, and it wants to be fun in English. The *ottava rima* stanza is inherently humorous. Excessive earnestness, I’m glad to say, is not a defect I’ve often been accused of.

What we have in this volume is slightly more than half of what Ariosto wrote—primarily because the production costs of an enormous and unwieldy volume (or volumes) would have made for a discouragingly expensive book, which would have defeated my purpose of broadening Ariosto’s Anglophone audience. It is also true that with nearly seven hundred pages here, most appetites will be satisfied.

Introduction

Charles S. Ross

“DID NOT CERVANTES write from within Ariosto?” asked John Updike, comparing the author of *Don Quixote* to Jorge Luis Borges, who read all the standard works of English literature (including translations). Outside his window Cervantes did not see knights lifting their lances in the air or beautiful women like Dulcinea. He saw a world of windmills. But Cervantes found chivalry in his library, and he lent *Don Quixote* its books—including a copy of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, the most famous poem of the Renaissance in Italy, presented here in a new verse translation by David Slavitt.

Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) was born in Reggio Emilia and eventually moved to nearby Ferrara. There from the age of fifteen to twenty he studied law, which he hated, before dedicating himself to the humanities until his father died in 1500, when he reluctantly accepted employment in the court of the ruling Este family. He had been eight years old when Matteo Maria Boiardo, whom he probably met, published his romantic epic *Orlando Innamorato*, the first of the three great poems (Tasso’s *La Gerusalemme liberata* [Jerusalem Delivered] was the third) that gave Ferrara the dominance in poetry that Renaissance Florence boasted in sculpture and painting. Ariosto spent his life completing the story that Boiardo left unfinished, publishing forty cantos in 1516, making changes for a second edition in 1521, and then adding six cantos, and many linguistic refinements, for the third edition of 1532, which included an engraving of his portrait by Titian.

Ariosto was a man of action. He knew the tribulations of command in military situations and the difficulties of dispensing justice, as a

young captain in the fortress of Canossa and later when he spent three years in the mountainous and primitive Garfagnana district of the Apennines. As he makes clear in his *Satires*, however, Ariosto preferred the quiet life, at home in Ferrara. A veteran diplomat, he was also a poet, a stage manager, and a playwright. His comedy *The Supposes*, the source of the Lucentio plot in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, is based on a play by Plautus but located in contemporary Ferrara. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is also in many respects a local poem, despite its global plot and worldwide fame, because Ariosto saw the world with an artist's eye for detail. Ideas are general, and Ariosto plays with his share of them, but he is Italy's greatest poet, after Dante, because he knew the precision of poetry.

For almost a century early Italian critics argued about how Ariosto's poem could please so many when it obviously violated the unity of subject Aristotle recommended, but no one argued about the *Furioso's* success. Galileo called Ariosto *divino*, and the poem was famous throughout Europe. The first lines of *Os Lusíadas*, the national epic of Portugal, imitate its opening stanza. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* borrows heavily from the whole poem. The fifth canto of the *Furioso*, which tells the story of a maid who makes love in a window while dressed in her lady's clothes, lies behind the Hero plot in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Orlando is the name of the hero of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, who writes poems on trees for Rosalind as Medoro does for Angelica in Ariosto's romantic epic. Handel's *Alcina* is based on Ariosto's enchantress. In *Waverley*, Sir Walter Scott's first novel, a character who dreams of Scotland's national glory finds a copy of Ariosto's poem on the ground. The famous Sicilian puppets are based largely on Boiardo's and Ariosto's characters.

The main obsession of Ariosto's story is the love of Orlando for Angelica. She is a pagan princess from Albracca, a city somewhere on the Silk Road to China, north of India. Orlando is a great warrior, but unlucky in love. Halfway through the story, Angelica turns out to prefer a commoner of her own religion. She finds Medoro wounded, they fall in love, and when they head east, he leaves behind poems about her carved in trees, which drive Orlando to distraction. Orlando runs mad until Astolfo (an English duke known for his wealth and indepen-

dence) restores his wits, which he finds in a bottle on the moon—a fit place for the mind of a lunatic.

The second main story line is the war between Christian Europe and historically Muslim countries that rages as Ariosto's poem opens. Charlemagne's forces fall back to Paris, which they defend until a series of supernatural interventions turn the tide and defeat the invaders, led by King Agramant. We usually define "romance" today as the genre that uses magic to resolve otherwise impossible contradictions, such as the recognition, which Ariosto inherited from Boiardo, that one's enemies might be no different from oneself. On both sides of the war there are hotheads, like Rodomonte, as well as chivalrous knights. Ariosto's narrator doubtless favors the Christian side, but it is also true that for a citizen of Ferrara the main enemy was not Islam but Venice or Rome. If the magic of Ariosto's style together with the presence of the hero Ruggiero among the Saracens is not enough to defuse the surface politics of the poem, Ariosto makes up the difference by once again bringing Astolfo to the rescue. After his visit to the moon, he learns magical ways to create enough soldiers and ships to cut off Agramant's supply lines in Africa and assure the safety of Paris.

Ever fleeing before Orlando like a holy grail, Angelica is an unobtainable object of desire, a trope developed during the medieval period in Arthurian romances. King Arthur, however, originated as a propaganda vehicle for the Normans, who conquered England in 1066. Former Vikings who settled in Britain by way of northern France, they had a problem of legitimacy, which they solved by propagating the idea that they were reclaiming rights the inhabitants of the island had lost to the invading Angles and Saxons sometime during the fifth century. On the order of King Henry II, grandson of William the Conqueror, a monk named Geoffrey of Monmouth concocted a phony Latin history of the hundred kings of England whose rule the Norman French claimed to continue, including the non-historical monarchs Cymbeline and Lear. There was in Geoffrey's history also a great deal of imaginative material about King Arthur, including his association with the magician Merlin. More material, such as the round table, was added as Geoffrey was translated into French, the language of the aristocracy in England.

From its roots in propaganda, the Arthurian legend developed further at the time of Eleanor of Aquitaine, mother of Richard the Lion-Hearted, who was married first to the king of France and then later to the king of England. Chrétien de Troyes, who in one of his stories mentions that he is writing for Eleanor's daughter Marie de Champagne, tells how a knight named Lancelot rescued Arthur's Queen Guinevere, only to have her snap at him for loving her so little that he hesitated to climb on the cart of infamy as he pursued her captor. In this story, titled *The Knight of the Cart*, and in other poems Chrétien created the form of multiple plots and interwoven stories of quest and adventure that is so much a feature of Boiardo's and Ariosto's art. The greatest quest was that of Perceval for the Holy Grail, a mystery that multiplied because Chrétien left the story unfinished. Others wrote continuations or new versions, until eventually Boiardo made Angelica herself an object of desire sought by many knights, like the grail.

Like the Norman French aristocrats, Boiardo and Ariosto used the motifs of Arthurian romance, transferred to the more historical world of Charlemagne, to give cultural prestige and an aura of legitimacy to Ferrara, a small state threatened by larger neighbors and run by the family whose ancestor Dante had consigned to one of the circles of Hell. With Boiardo's poem to rely on, Ariosto did not have to synthesize four centuries of Arthurian and Carolingian romances anew. We know from his letters that to benefit from the popularity of *Orlando Innamorato*, Ariosto deliberately drew on all of Boiardo's material—names, places, plots, characters, Bradamante's magic spear, praise of the Este family, inset stories of women unfortunate in love—including the main story lines involving Angelica, the defense of Paris, and the marriage of the Este progenitors Ruggiero and Bradamante.

Despite his borrowings, Ariosto wrote an entirely new poem. His darker tone and wittier verse may reflect the different realities of Italy during his lifetime, including the suffering in the aftermath of the French invasion of 1494, the year Boiardo died. Angelica is more duplicitous in the *Furioso* than in the *Innamorato*. But the most important difference between Boiardo and Ariosto was a refinement in language that underlies what Francesco De Sanctis called the magic of Ariosto's style. At the suggestion of Cardinal Pietro Bembo, Ariosto tells us

in his *Satires*, he wrote not in his native dialect but in the language of Florence instead, a linguistic turn that put him in the tradition of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. The use of the Tuscan tongue gave him a broader, more sophisticated audience, including two Florentine popes, Leo X (1513–1521) and Clemente VII (1523–1524), whom we know, also from his *Satires*, that Ariosto cultivated, though he was disappointed. Ariosto's secular, generally non-allegorical poem never outdoes Dante—no one does—nor does Ariosto compete with Petrarch as a lyric poet. His closest connection is instead to Boccaccio, whose fourteenth-century audience of men and particularly women of the merchant class found an equivalent in the urbane if still feudal gentry associated with the court of Ferrara, where wealth derived from the land rather than from trade.

In addition to writing in a type of dialect, Boiardo deliberately used a low style, imitating a *cantastorie*, or singer of tales in a public piazza. He did so because he wrote for Duke Ercole, a professional soldier rather than a scholar. His audience also included Ercole's wife Eleanor, who came from Naples, and their precocious daughter Isabella, born the same year as Ariosto. Ariosto also wrote for Isabella d'Este—we know that she repeatedly asked him to read to her—but by then she was an older, more sophisticated woman. The third book of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*—written when Isabella was in her late teens—is notably more detailed than the earlier parts of his poem, and Jo Ann Cavallo notes (in *The Romance Epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso*, 2004) that Ariosto deliberately continued this more complex, more sophisticated style. Nothing Boiardo does matches the realism of Ariosto's description of Alcina's wave-like breasts, which Gotthold Ephraim Lessing singled out in *Laocoön*, his essay on painting and poetry, as *too* realistic.

Highlighting both the realism and the fantasy of the poem, Ariosto's narrator is crucial to his poem's effect. In a long work where stories start and stop, characters wander in and out, and it's rarely possible to keep the whole picture in mind, Ariosto relies on style to frame what is going on. In a fantasy world of knights, ladies, giants, and orcs, the narrator's voice provides a unifying force. In a fragmented world that many see as mirrored in the centrifugal forces that drove Charlemagne's knights into the wider world beyond France, Ariosto

gave unity to his poem by creating a special kind of self-conscious narrator.

To capture the elusive voice of Ariosto's narrator, Slavitt throughout this appropriately sophisticated and often hilarious translation imitates the wry, worldly, sometimes slightly tipsy narrative voice that Byron developed for *Don Juan*, a poem also in *ottava rima* form by a poet who knew Italian poetry. Slavitt's narrator comments on his own language, particularly his similes and metaphors, his choice of words, or his decision to drop one story and go back to another that has been left hanging. These modest additions to the text are a form of finding direction by indirection, as Slavitt's self-conscious narrator embodies the modern critical perception that Ariosto's representations mirror his own process of composition. Slavitt's bemused Byronic voice recreates what it must have been like at the Ferrara court and at the same time finds a way to reconcile Ariosto's proliferating stories and the times when they were composed—a period of unparalleled cultural transitions that followed the voyages of Columbus, the French invasion of Italy in 1494 that began centuries of foreign domination, Luther's Reformation, and what could only be, after da Vinci and Michelangelo, a sense of nostalgia in the arts for the greatness that once was.

As a result the translator's pose provides a poetry generally lacking in the history of English versions of the *Furioso*, whether in stanzas like those of John Hoole and others in the eighteenth century, or by Sir Walter Scott's friend William Stewart Rose in 1831, by Barbara Reynolds in 1975, or in the prose versions of Allan Gilbert and of Guido Waldman, whose otherwise valuable word-for-word translation appears in the Oxford World's Classics series.

Slavitt has chosen an elastic version of iambic pentameter that suits modern reading habits, allowing his lines that are in our modern idiom to dance and play, to fool around, and sometimes to sing. Accomplished poet that he is, he employs to the full the enormous variety of syntactic patterns typical of modern verse to produce a lively, free-wheeling version that should delight modern readers as the original has always done.

Orlando Furioso

Canto Primo

- 1 Of ladies, knights, of passions and of wars,
of courtliness, and of valiant deeds I sing
that took place in that era when the Moors
crossed the sea from Africa to bring
such troubles to France. I shall tell of the great stores
of rage in the heart of Agramant, the king
who swore revenge on Charlemagne who had
murdered King Troiano (Agramant's dad).

- 2 Orlando, as well, I'll celebrate, setting down
what has not yet been told in verse or prose—
how love drove him insane, who had been known
before as wise and prudent (like me, God knows,
until I, too, went half mad with my own
love-foolly that makes it so hard to compose
in *ottava rima*. I pray I find the strength
to write this story in detail and at length).

- 3 O splendor of our age, Ippolito
d'Este, may it please your generous heart
to receive this text and dedication. I know
how great is my debt to you, but accept this part
repayment of ink and paper, and the flow
of words—which tax the limits of my art.
They may not amount to very much, it's true,
but they're all I have and I offer them to you.

- 4 Among the illustrious heroes you will hear
my praises of, I mention first Ruggiero,
the founder of your house, who, without fear
accomplished such splendid deeds long years ago.
I ask for your attention and your ear.
Pause in the business of state as I let you know
how he deserves our admiration in rhymes
that will, I hope, revive those bygone times.
- 5 Orlando loved Angelica, and she
was the one for whom he won his numberless
triumphs in India, Media, Tartary
and then brought her back with him where success
waited among the Pyrenees, where he
joined with the French and Germans, the noblesse
of Charlemagne there encamped and prepared to fight
with Marsilio, and also Agramant, quite
- 6 filled with a foolish zeal to bring France low.
The former had led from Africa as many
men with swords and lances as would go,
while the latter had raised a force in Spain. Again he
threatened the realm of France. Orlando, though,
arrived in the nick of time to help, but when he
got there he was sorry he had come,
for the lady whom he loved was taken from
- 7 his protection. How men are often wrong!
She whom he had loved and had defended
from west to east in many bloody and long
struggles was taken from him—with strong and splendid
friends at hand, and at home. Ah, she was gone!
And the emperor had done it. He'd intended
to use her to fight against a conflagration
that was a threat to him and to his nation.

- 8 Some days before that, a dispute had arisen
between the two men, both of whom desired
Angelica—Count Orlando and his cousin
Rinaldo. Both their gallant hearts were fired.
Charlemagne thought such a quarrel wasn't
helpful at all, and the emperor was inspired
to put her at least for the moment in the care
of the Duke of Bavaria. She would be quite safe there,
- 9 and later would be the prize awarded to
whoever in the battle had killed more
of the infidel horde, for this way each would do
his utmost in helping the Christians win the war.
But it didn't work out. The emperor's men withdrew.
In fact they fled. And there were more than a few
who were taken captive. The Duke was among these.
His pennants flapped forlornly in the breeze
- 10 above his empty tent, where the girl was left
alone. What should she do? Where should she go?
She looked out at the battlefield, bereft
that Fortune that day had favored the Christians' foe.
She mounted a riderless horse (it was hardly theft)
and headed for the woods, *prestissimo*.
There, on a narrow path, in the dappling light
she saw that someone was running toward her—a knight.
- 11 He wore on his back a cuirass, and on his head
a plumed helmet. At his side he bore
a sword. With his shield on his arm he sped
faster than some farm lad racing for
the prize they award to the winner, the bright red
palio. No shepherdess before
a viper in the field could have changed direction
faster than she did. With a quick inspection

- 12 she recognized him. He was Rinaldo, lord
of Montalban, the famous son of Amon,
whose war-horse, Bayard, happened by some hard
chance to have run off. As the knight came on,
he recognized Angelica. Not a word
passed between them, but his heart had staked its claim on
her beauty, by which he was long ago enraptured
as in the nets of love the knight was captured.
- 13 Having turned her horse around, the lady
hurries away disturbed with the reins held slack.
She lets the animal find its way through the shady
underbrush, while often she looks back
for any sign of the knight she wants to evade. He
is on foot, but still, he may follow her track.
Back and forth the horse meanders until
they emerge at a riverside down a little hill.
- 14 But at that river's edge there stood Ferraù,
dusty and soaked with sweat, having just come
from the battlefield. And he was tired and so
thirsty, and had very much wanted some
water to drink. He knelt down and leaned low
as an animal might in order to drink from
the stream, but somehow the helmet fell from his head
and into the river and sank as if it were lead.
- 15 He sees a girl approaching, terrified
and screaming out in fear, which of course surprises
the Saracen knight. The rider's eyes are as wide
as those of her horse. And then he recognizes
the frightened girl who has halted at his side.
It is Angelica. And he realizes
what a stroke of luck this is—for this knight too
loves her as much as the two French cousins do.

- 16 It is not merely knightly courtesy
but love for her that burns in his bosom that
makes him offer his aid and protection. He
is as bold as if had not lost his hat.
He and Rinaldo had both fought manfully
and tried each other's swords and mettle at
many times and places, thrusting and smiting.
And here Rinaldo appears. They resume their fighting.
- 17 Boom! Clank! They go at each other striking steel
on steel, and it sounds like a couple of blacksmiths pounding
on a pair of anvils rather than chain mail
and armor, each of their mighty blows resounding
throughout the woodland like a thunder peal.
But while they are engaged in this astounding
struggle, Angelica turns her palfrey's face
in another direction, and she rides off apace.
- 18 A thrust from one, and from the other a parry,
and then the pattern is reversed. Each tried
to best the other by some extraordinary
effort, but as they fought by the riverside
they were evenly matched. But then, in a momentary
pause, Rinaldo addressing the Spaniard cried
out: "What is the purpose of this affray?
The girl we are fighting over has gone away.
- 19 "Inasmuch as you and I both feel
a passion for her, I ask you would it not
be better if we agreed upon a deal?
Let's follow her. And as soon as we have caught
up with her and she's in our power, we'll
resume our combat. She, after all, is what
we're fighting about. We must realize
the fight does not make sense without the prize.

- 20 “Let us pursue her together before she goes too far away for us to catch her. Then, we can continue dealing each other blows to decide which of us two competing men will have her for his own. Only heaven knows what good our struggle here can do us when she’s gone.” The two agreed with a brief nod, avoiding thus a complete *dégringolade*.
- 21 So pleasing and so reasonable an idea this was that the Christian and the Pagan became, at least for the moment, friends. As when you see a fog burn off in the morning there was the same brightening. Ferrau thought that it would be a lapse of chivalric manners and a shame for Rinaldo to have to travel on foot. Of course, he invited him up to the crupper of his horse.
- 22 Thus the code of chivalry, so splendid that these two knights of different faiths and nations could join together as soon as their fighting had ended. Still feeling their many bruises’ sharp sensations, they yet could travel together. Thus they wended their way on a winding path through the vegetation’s twists until the pricks of their four spurs slowed, then stopped—as they reached a fork in the woodland road.
- 23 What then to do? The two roads in the wood diverging in different directions really seem about the same. The knights think that a good plan might be to separate. If the team followed both pathways then their chances would be doubled, would they not? And to this scheme they agreed. Let Fate decide which of the two would find the girl. With no further ado,

- 24 they each took a different path. The Saracen
picked the one on the left, an inviting track
Angelica might have been tempted to take when
she had arrived at this place. But it led back
to that spot beside the river where the men
had fought not long before. Alas! Alack!
But as long as he's here, he thinks, he may as well
look again for that helmet of his that fell
- 25 into the water. He cut a limb from a tree
and used it to poke and prod into the muck
down at the bottom where his helmet might be
hidden somehow, or very possibly stuck.
Again and again he tries unsuccessfully,
and he's losing patience and cursing his bad luck,
when he sees emerging from midstream, a knight
fierce of mien and wearing armor bright
- 26 except for the helmet he carries in his hand—
the very one that Ferrau had let fall
and searches for. He speaks a reprimand:
“Breaker of faith! Why do you worry at all
about this helmet that you took from me and
promised you would return, as I recall?
You killed Angelica's brother Argalia, but see
him stand before you now, for I am he.
- 27 “Your promise, if I may venture to remind you,
was that you would throw the helmet into the stream
after the rest of the armor. But you did not do
what Fortune contrived to accomplish. It would seem
that Fortune is more faithful. What you promised to
do, it did, and I have greater esteem
for it than you. Mine is in my hand. Oh,
look elsewhere for yours, perhaps to Orlando

- 28 “or maybe his cousin Rinaldo. The former wears Altmonte’s helm, and the latter Mambrino’s. Each of these is rich and attractive and compares with this one I have back. If you can, fetch either of those as a trophy, for one who swears should keep his word.” Thus ended the ghost’s speech. The Saracen’s face went pale in fear and shame, for Argalia’s ghost had been correct in its claim.
- 29 What was most fearsome about the ghost was not that he was a ghost but that he was correct. Ferrau was so filled with shame and also hot with anger that he swore he would reject all helmets in the world but that to be got back from Orlando—along with his self-respect restored by besting him in martial strife. And he took an oath upon his mother’s life.
- 30 He would regain what had been so rudely taken from Altmonte’s noble head or he would die trying. He felt a righteous rage awaken that could refine his life and clarify his mind. This quest would never be forsaken! He did not even pause to bid goodbye to the ghost but was off to find Orlando! The good Rinaldo meanwhile was occupied in the wood.
- 31 He is looking, let us remember, for the fair Angelica and, as he tramples through the trees, he gets a glimpse of his charger. It’s Bayard there, prancing along, as prettily as you please. “Stop,” calls Rinaldo, but his command or prayer the animal ignores. Rinaldo sees him canter off, which is infuriating, for he’d rather be riding the horse than ambulating.

- 32 But while he is thus engaged in trying to catch
the disobedient beast, we may as well turn
our attention to the adventures of the match-
less Angelica, whose paramount concern
is flight from the two knights who are trying to snatch
her as their prize. And we can now discern
her running through the oaks, the elms, and the beeches
in the branches of which an owl comments with screeches.
- 33 She hurtles through the thickets, climbing hills
and running downwards into valleys, hearing
noises behind her, each one of which fills
her heart with icy terror. In a clearing
she pauses for a moment and she stills
her breathing to listen, afraid Rinaldo is nearing.
For all she knows, he could be right behind her.
She fears that at any moment he will find her.
- 34 She is like a fawn or a young goat
that has from its thicket hiding place just seen
a pitiless leopard tear its mother's throat
or rip her breast so that blood stains the green
grass of the forest floor. At each remote
twig snap it expects to find itself between
the powerful jaws of that most savage beast,
the savory sweetmeat of its horrid feast.
- 35 All that day and night the maiden treks
through the dark woodland. She hardly even knows
how she can go on, so that the next
step is unimaginable. She slows
down at last in her flight from those two sex-
crazed knights, and finds a grove where green grass grows,
cool and welcoming. She cannot pass
by but stops and rests on that verdant grass

36 between two brooks that babble over the stones
that lie in their beds. She feels a pleasant breeze
that gentles her hair. She listens to the drones
that come from the flower bushes where the bees
drink nectar. She dismounts, pleased with the zone's
charms. She lets her tired palfrey graze
on the lush grass that grows near the brooks, while she,
still cautious, searches the vicinity

37 for a place to rest a while in safety. And look,
there is a clump of rose bushes with flowers
swaying gently above the purling brook.
It is one of those delightful secret bowers
where she may be safe. In this bucolic nook
the rays of the sun, even at midday hours,
were filtered so that they scarcely penetrated
the foliage that was nicely variegated.

38 The grass is thick and soft. She feels enough
confidence to rest at least for a bit
and she sinks down on the inviting duff
where she drifts off promptly into sleep, but it
is interrupted by the sound of hoof
beats upon the ground. In exquisite
fear she raises herself. Was it a dream?
No, it is a knight who has come to the stream.

39 A friend? She hopes. An enemy? She fears.
In breathless silence she waits for the outcome
and scrutinizes his features as he nears
and then dismounts by the bank of the brook some
yards away. He seems on the verge of tears,
his expression so dejected and so glum.
Motionless, as if he were carved in stone,
he must suppose that he is all alone.

- 40 In utter dejection he stood there for nearly an hour,
or so, my Lord, it seemed, and then in a sad
voice he began a lament of such beauty and power
as to break a rock's heart or tame a mad
and cruel tiger. From his eyes a shower
of tears poured down his cheeks in grief. He had
never before experienced such dismay. No
fire burned so hot in any volcano
- 41 as in his breast. "My mind destroys my own
heart, burning it, freezing, and abusing,
and I am helpless, except to weep and moan
in grief and rage. The maiden of my choosing
has been despoiled. The tender bud is blown,
and yet I cannot cease my tender musing.
Another man has come along to pluck
her delicate flower. And I am out of luck.
- 42 "A virgin is much like a perfect rose
that rests alone and secure, where neither sheep
nor shepherd have come near, and no one knows
its beauty. The dew and the gentle breezes keep
it fresh and its thorns protect its sweet repose.
Youths and enamored maidens in their deep
devotion to wearing flowers will deck their heads
in wreaths of roses, yellows, whites, and reds.
- 43 "Taken from her stalk and innocence
she loses all her appeal, all beauty and grace.
However charming she may have been, hence-
forward she is worthless. In the place
of that precious blossom she ought to have had the sense
to give up her eyes, or her life. Those compliments
men used to pay her now stop. It is rough:
it may have been only once, but once is enough.

- 44 “Now that she is of no interest to any
other men, let him who enjoyed her keep her.
A cruel Dame Fortune. Dreadful misfortune. When he
took her, my heart should have given up, but a deeper
ardor yet remains. It is uncanny.
I cannot quite decide if I should weep or
curse her, and I know I should not care,
and yet I do, and I am in despair!”
- 45 Who is this Mr. Complainer weeping by
the side of the brook? He is the Circassian king,
Sacripant, and clearly the reason why
he is distressed is his love for the pretty thing,
Angelica, who hears him, being nigh.
She recognized him as she heard him sing.
(Is there no one of these puissant men of arms
who has not been driven mad by Angelica’s charms?)
- 46 From his home far in the east where the sun arises
had Sacripant traveled for love’s sake and this girl’s
far to the West where the sun sets. His hope dies as
he learns she has followed Orlando and those churls,
the French who have made of her one of their prizes—
to whichever of their princes, dukes, or earls
should prove outstanding, fighting against the Moors.
Those dreadful Frenchmen! Bastards! Villains! Boors!
- 47 He had been in the camp when the word came
of the rout of Charlemagne and the forces of France,
and he had then gone off in pursuit of the same
Angelica, making the best of this happy chance
perhaps to find her again and to reclaim
at least the pains of love that his circumstance
allowed, for he suffered so much that even the bright
sun might have stopped in the sky to pity his plight.

48 So there he is, weeping. He moans and complains
of love and grief that are all the stronger for
being mixed together. He gives voice to his pains
but the actual words he speaks are not worth your
attention, coming more from his heart than his brains,
and hardly original. So we may ignore
them. But what are the odds? It is absurd:
she of whom he sang heard every word!

49 Angelica, in hiding on her tuffet,
listened but was not at all impressed.
Sacripant's obsession? He could stuff it!
She'd heard him tell her before of how distressed
he was back then. And she'd heard quite enough. It
bored her, hearing it again expressed.
In all of the wide world, what man was there
who deserved a girl like her? Why should she care?

50 On the other hand, it did occur to her
that Sacripant might now be of some use.
She was alone and helpless—and would prefer
to have a guide in these woods. Would she refuse
help if she were drowning? She did not bear
the knight ill will. Indeed it might amuse
her to allow him to serve as her escort.
He'd loved her once. She'd let him pay her court.

51 She has no plan whatever to relieve
the ache he complains about, that pain that wastes
his spirit. But she is willing to deceive,
to lead him on a little, promising tastes
of the goodies he yearns for. Let him believe
there is yet some hope he may have for the chaste
sweet girl he once knew. Then she can return
to the truth, and herself, and let Sacripant burn.

- 52 So out of her hiding place Angelica pops
as if, like Diana, she has just appeared
from a hunting party in some nearby copse.
Exploiting the fact that he must find it weird,
she says, “May peace be with you,” and she stops.
“May God defend me, but I am a-feared
that you have of me a false and unflattering
opinion, and I am guilty of no such thing
- 53 “as you complain of.” She then gave him a look
and sigh as any long lost son might get
from his own loving mother. Angelica took
what seemed a heartfelt breath and then she let
out an enormous sigh of joy and shook
as if her heart were full to see him yet
alive. He was struck dumb to see this fair
angelic apparition standing there.
- 54 Melting with love and sweet desire he ran
to his lady, his goddess, his paragon, whose arms
enfolded him—as she might not have done
back in her native Cathay, whose villages, farms,
and palaces flashed before her. She hoped that one
day she might yet return there, using her charms,
her wits, and determination. One day she would
be rid of all these foreign devils, and good
- 55 riddance to them all. She then rehearses
for Sacripant a tale of how she was sent
to the king of the Sericanians (whom she curses)
to ask for his aid. She tells where she next went
and of her many adventures and reverses.
Orlando, with most honorable intent,
came to her rescue time and again to save
her from death and dishonor and was brave.

- 56 A lively account, and even perhaps true,
though few sane men would think so. But the knight
so much yearned to believe and give credence to
her words that he considered them in the light
of his all but blinding passion, although he knew
it might be in some details not quite right.
He adored her claim that she was still as pure
as Mary was, for thus did she adjure.
- 57 “If Aglant’s son Orlando was too dim
to take advantage of his luck and seize
the maiden’s maidenhood, I am not him,
and if fickle fortune’s unreliable breeze
blows me this opportunity, I’m not prim
but will give thanks for it upon my knees.
I shall pluck from her that fresh red rose
he could have had, but didn’t. (Why? God knows!)”
- 58 So he mused, but to himself of course.
And he reassured himself that if she fought,
and therefore he was required to use force,
she would still be grateful that he brought
such sweetness to her that all her remorse
would melt at the delight that he had taught
her to enjoy, and although she might not admit it
a part of her would be thankful that he did it.
- 59 A credulous fellow, what? At any rate
he believed her and he now believed as well
the rationale he’d given himself, and with great
eagerness he prepared to do the swell
and dirty deed and to luxuriate
in all her charms, but she’s saved by the bell,
or anyway a loud noise in the wood
of a knight approaching. And this was not good.

- 60 Don't you hate it when this happens? He
places his helmet back on his head and goes
to where his horse is grazing on the lea,
puts on its bridle and mounts it, for he knows
he'll have to use his lance. This chivalry
business has its downside, I suppose.
The girl will keep. He will attend to this harder
thing and come back to her with greater ardor.
- 61 So who in the hell is it? He's wearing a white
outfit and his crest is a white pennon.
Whoever he is, he's a dreadful nuisance right
at this particular place and moment. Men on
horses in armor were not what Sacripant quite
had in mind for the afternoon. But then on
came this chevalier, and Sacripant's shout
of challenge and defiance called him out.
- 62 Whoever it is, Sacripant is sure
he can knock him out of the saddle and put him down
on the ground in disgrace and in discomfiture.
But the other spurs his charger and at a bound
they come at one another and strike in pure
fury. In each of their shields there is a round
puncture from the other's puissant lance
that struck their breastplates, but merely with a glance.
- 63 The chargers did not swerve or deviate
but like two butting rams ran straight and true,
The Saracen's mount that men had admired as great
and noble, died at once. The other one, too,
fell but then rose again, more fortunate
and ready at the touch of the spurs to renew
the combat—while the Saracen lay on the ground
under his horse, the weight of which pinned him down.

- 64 The unknown knight looking down from his saddle decided
the fight was hardly worth continuing.
Slowly he turned the animal he bestrode
and rode away, leaving the Saracen king
behind on the ground as if he had collided
with a stone wall or some such immovable thing.
At a curve in the pretty mountain path the white
knight turned and disappeared from sight.
- 65 Imagine a plowman whose team of oxen has just
been struck by a bolt of lightning, and they lie dead
there on the ground. The plowman himself, almost
killed by the same thunderbolt, shakes his head,
rubs his eyes, and sees what he has lost.
The nearby pine tree stands without a shred
of foliage, all its needles gone. He blinks.
So with the Saracen knight on the ground, who thinks
- 66 that this is dreadful. And worse than his body's pains
is the fact that Angelica, nearby, saw it all,
and he is humiliated. He struggles and strains,
and she has to come and help him try to crawl
from under the weight of the dead beast. He remains
silent as Angelica works to haul
him free, struck utterly dumb in his total shame,
but she speaks up: "My lord, you're not to blame.
- 67 "The fault was that of your horse who was more in need
of food and rest than jousting in new combat.
And that warrior can't claim credit for any deed
of chivalry, for he left the field, and that
made you the victor, technically. If he'd
stayed he might have been the loser at
your very able hands." And every word
she spoke was cheerful, soothing, and absurd.

- 68 And now, in the quiet clearing there comes into view
a messenger on a horse that is galloping fast.
He stops and, breathless, inquires of the two
if there has been knight who has recently passed
with a white shield and pennant. Yes, they do
have some recollection, Sacripant says, in the last
little while that there was just such a knight
with whom he had an inconclusive fight.
- 69 “But who on earth was it?” is Sacripant’s
question. “He has left me without a mount,
and in this inconvenient circumstance,
I want one day to settle our accounts.”
The messenger shares his confident cognizance
of the name, and, startled, they hear him announce:
“The one who bested you and threw you down
was a lady, high-born and of great renown.
- 70 “She is Bradamante, beautiful, strong,
and famous throughout the world. It was she who took
every shred of honor that used to belong
to you. It’s gone forever, and you will look
like an utter fool, a subject for joke and song,
an embarrassment to knighthood.” Then from the brook
he turned his horse’s head and cantered away.
The Saracen had nothing whatever to say.
- 71 For a long time, he stands there, silent, feeling
absolutely terrible. To have been bested
so soundly and by a woman. . . . It left him reeling.
He mounted Angelica’s horse and, fallen-crested,
invited her to ride behind him, appealing
to her with a gesture to do as he’d requested.
His lustful plans for her were all but forgotten.
His present mood was absolutely rotten.

- 72 Off they rode together but had not gone
two miles through the wood before they heard resounding
a very great clamor. What was going on?
There appeared before the two of them an astounding
charger in cloth of gold caparison,
running, rearing, and effortlessly bounding
over rivulets, bushes and trees with a force
and strength one seldom sees even in a horse.
- 73 “If I am not mistaken, what I see
through all those branches,” Angelica exclaims,
“is none other than Bayard, running free
and just what we need at the moment, for it shames
us to be sharing the one mount, you and me.”
At this point he approaches and even aims
for Angelica and Sacripant, as if to provide
what they require—another horse to ride.
- 74 Sacripant dismounts and slowly nears
the magnificent horse. He holds out a confident hand
to seize the rein. The horse flattens his ears,
turns his rump to the knight, and with a grand
capriole kicks at the stranger and nearly tears
his head off, but the blow is glancing and
it merely knocks him down upon his ass.
He looks quite foolish sitting on the grass.
- 75 Bayard, meanwhile, ambles gently to
the girl whom he remembers very clearly
as a hound would recall its master. She was who
back in far Albracca had brought him nearly
every day nice treats. (It had nothing to do
with him that she adored Rinaldo dearly,
though the love she bore him was not reciprocated
and over the course of time it had much abated.)

- 76 With her left hand she takes the horse's bridle
and she strokes his neck and withers. The great beast
is submissive as a lamb in his friendly sidle
up to Angelica's mount, although he's at least
five hands higher. Sacripant, not idle,
seizes the moment and mounts him, now that he's ceased
his struggles. Nevertheless either from fright
or anger he is careful and holds on tight.
- 77 Chinka-chink, chinka-chink. Angelica now hears
the sound of a knight in armor approaching on foot.
She recognizes him at once as he appears—
it is, indeed, Rinaldo, Amon's son, but
she hates him more than the stork that hates and fears
the falcon. He hated her once, but now is in rut,
for they have changed roles and places in their passions
as happens not only in love but in women's fashions.
- 78 What happened to them was that there are two springs
off in the Ardennes, not far apart,
and drinking the waters of one of them always brings
love and longing to the drinker's heart,
But as you have guessed already, knowing how things
often work, the other's waters will start
a hatred in one who has tasted them. And these
two imbibed these contrarities.
- 79 The waters of that second spring turn
a heart hard, and when Angelica spies
Rinaldo her face darkens, her eyes burn,
and, speaking with a trembling voice, she tries
to share with Sacripant her great concern
and to ride away at once, for otherwise,
that warrior she wants to avoid will be
upon them both. She urges him to flee.

- 80 The Saracen is haughty and inquires,
“Do you trust me so little that you want
to run away from him? A knight aspires
to glorious deeds! And will not Sacripant
defend you—as I did against the desires
of Agrican once? It is no empty vaunt,
but I will not run away.” With a stern visage he
considered their uncomfortable syzygy.
- 81 How can she answer this nonsense? What can she say?
Rinaldo approaches, sees them, and with a shout
challenges the Saracen, who, by the way,
is riding his horse. One might also point out
that for his beloved Angelica, he can display
valor and strength of arms in this welcome bout.
What ensued between the knights we shall postpone
to another canto, for this one is done.

Canto Secondo

- 1 O love, O most unjust, why do you so
rarely make our desires coincide?
Are you some kind of mischief-maker, a low
jackanapes who takes particular pride
in the discord of two hearts? You make me go
not by an easy ford across the wide
river but through its deepest, most treacherous places
so that the one I adore flees my embraces
- 2 while she who desires mine, you make me despise.
Rinaldo thinks Angelica is fair
but to her he is ugly and she turns her eyes
away from him, although once the pair

found themselves—it's hardly a surprise—
with their roles reversed. He cries and tears his hair
that she feels such great hate for him that she would,
if she had the choice between them, think death good.

- 3 Proudly Rinaldo shouts to Sacripant,
“Horse thief, dismount at once. I do not permit
my things to be taken from me, and I want
to make you pay for what you have done, for it
is altogether vile. Also I can't
leave that maiden with you who are as unfit
for her as you are for the horse you sit on. Churl,
get down, give me my charger, and give me the girl.”
- 4 “I am no thief, sir. I hurl the insult back
into your teeth, where it belongs. I agree
that the horse is splendid indeed, as is its tack.
If you want it, you'll have to purchase it from me
and the price you'll pay will be high. Your verbal attack
is a sad display of feeble acerbity.
The girl's incomparable . . . But no more palaver,
for you'll have to kill me if you want to have her.”
- 5 So now a metaphor. Dogs would do well
growling at one another over the right
to a bone or just out of hatred, and snarling like hell,
their eyes reddened and glaring, ready to fight,
and the hair is up on their backs and in one fell
swoop they are at each other to claw and bite;
so it was with the two knights armed with swords
exchanging insults and then done with words.
- 6 Sacripant is on horseback, let us recall,
and Rinaldo is on foot, so one might assume
the Circassian had the advantage in this brawl,
but he is less effective than some groom

dressed in knight's armor, because the animal, Bayard, belongs after all to Rinaldo, whom he loves and wants to protect. It never occurs to him to respond to signals from reins or spurs.

- 7 Sacripant wants to go forward, but the horse balks and stands there. Or when the rider tries to get him to stand still, the horse, of course, runs or trots, bucks, or otherwise frustrates the knight, who cannot contrive to force Bayard to behave or recognize any command from him. So with a frown Sacrapant gives up and he jumps down.
- 8 Okay, okay, so now they can begin. One sword clangs and the other in riposte answers with a clang. There's such a din as, high and low, they do their uttermost apparently to cleave one another in twain lengthwise that you might think the ghost of Vulcan had returned to forge for Jove those thunderbolts the Olympian gods all love.
- 9 They settle into a routine with their feints, parries, retreats, advances, coups doublés, and from time to time a flèche, which the constraints of armor make most strenuous. Their displays of swordsmanship are beyond any critic's complaints and even deserving of a lot of praise. One retreats, the other advances, and then they do in reverse the same thing over again.
- 10 Rinaldo raises up Fusberta, which, believe it or not, is the name of his broadsword. Sacripant holds out his shield, a rich construction of bone and steel. But it's cardboard

when the sword slices right through it. (Son of a bitch!)
He sits on the ground and asks for misericord.
Angelica, seeing what has happened, is not
at all pleased. You do remember the plot?

- 11 She's fleeing from Rinaldo, and here he stands,
victorious, and no one is left to protect her.
Unless she wants to give in to his demands,
as, if she remains there, he would expect her
to do, she had better make some other plans
and leave at once, out of self-respect or
simply fear. She does not makes excuses
but with a twitch of the reins of her horse vamooses.
- 12 Along a rough and narrow path she goes
looking behind her every few minutes to see
whether Rinaldo is following, drawing close,
about to seize her. But, no, she seems to be
doing well enough, when one of those
hermits appears (by chance or design?) and he
has a great long beard, luxuriant and flowing.
He seems to be pious, venerable, and knowing.
- 13 Thin as a rail from years of rigorous fasts,
he lurches along upon a donkey's back,
He is one of those other-worldly ecclesiasts,
but as he sees her approaching on the track,
he warms to her come-hither look that lasts
more than a moment. He lets his reins go slack
as his eyes meet hers. He manages a nod
and a wan smile and he tells her to go with God.
- 14 Angelica asks the friar in which direction
to go if she wants to find a seaport where
she can leave France behind her and find protection
from Rinaldo, whose name she wants never to hear

again. The friar offers no objection,
but promises to find some way to spare
her from any further such annoyance,
for he can do necromancy and clairvoyance.

- 15 From a pouch he carried he took out a book,
an enchiridion with incantations,
charms, and spells, and after a brief look,
produced a servant by some conjurations
and issued a series of orders, which he took
down—they were more commands than exhortations.
Forthwith the good factotum vanished from view
to accomplish what the friar had told him to do.
- 16 Back at the grove where the two knights still contended
the servant interposed himself to inquire
what good they were doing. The fighting should be ended,
for Orlando and the object of their desire
were now together safely as they wended
their way toward Paris. “If in your hot ire
one of you kills the other, what reward
will he have obtained by the use of his broadsword?”
- 17 “They are no more than a mile or so away,
laughing together about the joke that you
have provided them because of your pointless fray.
If you’ll accept my suggestion, what you should do
is follow after them quickly. You yet may
prevent their escape, for if they make it through
to the safety of Paris among all those armed men,
neither of you will ever see her again.”
- 18 At once the knights cease fighting. They recognize
that what they have been doing makes no sense.
The advice the stranger has offered them seems wise.
Orlando appears to have tricked both of them. Hence,

wanting to cut his cousin down to size,
Rinaldo mounts his horse and with vehemence
swears to tear Orlando's body apart,
drink his blood, and eat his beating heart.

19 He gallops away, without having said good-bye
to Sacripant or offered that knight a ride
behind him on the crupper as courtesy
might have prompted. Across the countryside
the steed leaps rivers and crashes through the high
bushes, as the valiant knight astride
him spurs him on even faster in his course,
and Bayard responds. He is a noble horse!

20 Ah, but good sir, you think you have caught me out
in an inconsistency—that Bayard fled
from Rinaldo and now he's obedient? Let doubt
not trouble your mind, for nowhere have you read
that the horse was vicious. Let me explain about
how that very intelligent animal led
his master by these maneuvers in the direction
of the girl who was the object of his affection.

21 Remember when the girl fled from the tent?
Bayard, whose saddle happened just then to be
vacant (his master was fighting some prominent
baron on foot), followed along to see
which way she was headed. Wherever she went
the horse was close behind her hoping that he
could get her to mount him so that he could bring
her back to Rinaldo, which would be a good thing.

22 This is why, in the forest, he had not let
his master mount him—so that he could lead
Rinaldo toward her and help him to get
her back. And twice his master did but he'd

first encountered Ferrau and then had met
the Circassian, who'd both managed to impede
his progress, as you've heard from this reporter.
So it is consistent, you'll grant, and all in order.

23 The only wrinkle is that Bayard, too,
believed the words of that demon messenger
and does not suspect that his words might not be true.
The horse makes haste to Paris, chasing her
as fast as the wind or faster as they pursue
the girl—there is no need for crop or spur,
although Rinaldo burns with both love and wrath.
The horse's hooves seem to fly above the path.

24 They run thus, hardly stopping, day and night
on his quest for the maiden and also to come face
to face with Orlando, Anglant's lord, and fight
to the death with him, redeeming the disgrace
that would otherwise stain his name, nor can he wait
to hold Angelica in his close embrace.
At length, off in the distance on the plain,
he sees the broken army of Charlemagne.

25 The emperor there is beleaguered and expects
to be attacked and besieged by the African king.
He has ordered repairs to the city wall that protects
those within. There is much provisioning
and, to help in this battle, he directs
someone to travel to Britain and to bring
reinforcements. Who shall it be? Of course,
Rinaldo who has got this terrific horse!

26 Rinaldo is not delighted by this honor,
and would rather continue to search for his inamorata.
He wants to spend his time and attention on her
but he agrees, for Charlemagne has got a

legitimate need, and he had better be gone or
bear the great disgrace and the stigmata
of having failed his liege. Not even one day
does Rinaldo dawdle in Paris, but is away

27 and on the road again. To Calais' docks
he hurries and arrives in a matter of hours
where the boats are moored. On high, the weathercocks
are indicating an ill wind with great powers.
A large amount of money, however, unlocks
the heart of one captain who nonetheless glowers
as he at last agrees and they embark,
although the sky is turning rather dark.

28 Have you already gathered that there's to be
a scene of tempest, picturesque and scary?
The ship is tossed upon a turbulent sea,
and the Wind itself appears to Rinaldo very
angry that with such impertinence he
has ignored the warnings and all of the contrary
indications. He should not have set out.
The Wind toys with the vessel and hurls it about.

29 Pitching, yawing, rolling in the churning
sea, the boat is out of control, and the men
shorten sail in the hope of avoiding turning
turtle and the helmsman struggles, when
each wave breaks. That money they are earning
seems less good a bargain now than then.
The wind sends sheets of spray, the loftiest
of which can douse the man in the crow's nest.

30 Starboard, port, they go where the Wind drives
the helpless vessel (a ten on the Beaufort
scale) and what they want is to save their lives
as the storm howls. And we'll leave them there for a short

while as our attention now arrives
at Bradamante, of whom we give report.
She is Rinaldo's sister, the damosel-
warrior. Let's follow her for a spell.

- 31 She is, it hardly needs to be said, the fair
daughter of Duke Amon and Beatrice
(We'll give it the fourth syllable, debonair
and rather more fun and it imparts to our speech a
certain tone.) She was as valiant as fair,
and Charlemagne was pleased that she could teach a
thing or two to most of the men in fighting.
To watch her doing battle was quite exciting.
- 32 Rinaldo's sister, she was loved by Ruggiero,
who came across from Africa with King
Agramant, et cetera. This hero
was, in brief, well born. The only thing
one has to mention is that—oh dear, oh dear, oh—
Fortune, who is often challenging,
had allowed them only one brief time together,
and then had kept them apart as on a tether.
- 33 Bradamante, nevertheless, was as secure
as if she had a thousand squadron guard
for every move, as she, the intent pursuer
of her innamorato, looked quite hard
high and low. And everybody knew her
as the one who'd bested Sacripant, evil-starred
Circassian. Bradamante crossed a thick wood,
climbed a mountain . . . and there a spring looked good.
- 34 A pretty spot it was, with the water flowing
gently through a meadow in the shade
of ancient trees that seemed to have been growing
just to perfect the place, which all but made

an invitation to travelers who were going
elsewhere to stop and rest a bit in this glade.
And Bradamante did, but as she turned her eyes
she saw there was a knight. (Surprise! Surprise!)

- 35 There he sits on a knoll where green and white
and yellow flowers blossom. He does not move
or speak, and he seems extremely sad, this knight,
whose shield and helmet hang on a branch above
his head of a beech to which his horse is tied.
The knight is all but heartbroken. From love?
From having survived some dreadful atrocity?
Bradamante is full of curiosity.
- 36 In a manner full of tact and deference
she makes an inquiry as to the cause
of his distress. Perhaps his preference
might be to keep his silence, but after a pause
and a gentle sigh, he decides to make reference
to that catastrophe that clearly gnaws
still at his vitals, causing him much grief.
To speak of it will perhaps give some relief.
- 37 Thus he spake: "I was leading men on foot
and coming into Charlemagne's camp where he
was waiting for Marsilio, that brute
who has turned against him. And I had with me
a beautiful girl to whom I had paid suit.
Near Rodonna, as if from mythology,
a knight appeared riding a wingèd steed.
Mortal? A spirit? But troublesome indeed!
- 38 "Whatever he was, he swooped down from the sky
as if he were some falcon diving upon
a defenseless dove, and even before I
had any idea what had happened, the girl was gone,

and from up above I heard her terrified cry.
There was nothing at all I could do except look on
as the knight with the girl in his arms got higher and smaller
and disappeared. I couldn't even call her.

39 “Imagine a ravenous kite that swoops to take
a chick from the run, and its mother, the brood-hen, squawks
in grief as if her chicken-heart would break,
and she curses the world that is full of kites and hawks.
That was how I felt, make no mistake.
My horse cannot fly. Exhausted, he barely walks,
putting one foot after another, weary
and quite unable to soar to some aerie.

40 “I would rather have had my heart torn out,
still beating, from my chest than lose that sweet
girl. I confess I left my soldiers without
a leader to follow after her, my feet
directed only by Love which was my scout.
My confidence in her was quite complete,
because I had no choice. Horses that fly
leave no prints on the ground to track them by.

41 “Six days I traveled from dawn to dusk through gloomy
landscapes of high cliffs and gaping chasms,
without a path that could indicate to me
how to proceed, but only strange phantasms
the wind whipped up from the dust or out of fummy
mists that would disappear like protoplasm.
I came at last to a craggy valley where
a beautiful fortress loomed up into the air.

42 “It shone as if it were made of stainless steel,
its turrets and crenellations dazzling bright,
and in that savage setting it seemed unreal.
I later learned that a team of devils quite

enchanted by smoke and incense against their will
had built this structure on its awesome height.
This is the home of that thief who flies through the air
and when he tires he comes back to his lair.

43 “From the countryside, he takes whatever he wants,
and men can do nothing at all to protect what they own,
or their wives, or their lives. Except to curse and shout taunts,
that are impotent. There had my lady gone,
and I could not even approach those lofty haunts.
At the bottom of that high cliff, all alone,
I looked up in the hopelessness love brings
and wished that I could grow a pair of wings.

44 “I was like a vixen that has lost its kit
to an eagle and hears it mewing still in the nest.
She cannot think of how to rescue it,
harkens to that sound, and does her best
to climb that height, but can’t. In exquisite
torment she tries and fails, then takes a rest,
and tries and fails again. She is afraid
and, what is even worse, her frail hopes fade.

45 “But as I loitered there, a pair of knights
arrived with a dwarf who was their guide. Could they
be of some help, I wondered, in scaling those heights?
The dwarf explained that they were on their way
with the lord of this magic castle in their sights.
Their dwarf guide was polite enough to say
that they were Gradasso, Sericana’s king,
and Ruggiero, and his job was to bring

46 “them to the castle high above us, the lord
of which they wanted to meet in combat—the one
who in full armor soars through the air aboard
the remarkable hippogryph. When he was done

speaking, I ventured myself to put in a word,
and asked them to pity my fate and, when they had won,
restore to me the lady whom I love
and whom he held captive in that fort above

47 “us. I told them what had happened and how
I had been utterly powerless to prevent
the kidnapping. I had followed them, but now
was at my wits’ end. These knights, heaven sent,
could do this for me! These two made a vow
to do so, and immediately went
down a steep slope to the valley and the base
of the castle’s wall—a rough and dangerous place.

48 “I looked out on that ominous field and prayed
for their success. I could see them each:
the distance was what, if a strong man essayed
to throw a rock and then again, he’d reach.
They discussed who would be first to go and made
throws of odd and even fingers, speech
being pointless. King Gradasso won,
so Rugerrio retired, and then the fun

49 “began as the Sericanian put his horn
up to his mouth and blew a mighty blast.
It echoed from the cliffs in challenge and scorn.
That mysterious lord of the castle rode at last
forth from the gate, not on a unicorn
but that even rarer hippogryph. Downcast,
I worried what a formidable foe
a warrior would be who was mounted so.

50 “It was slightly awkward getting off the ground,
as it is for a large crane to take off and fly.
It ran for a bit, flapping its wings till it found
wind enough to ascend, but presently

it cleared the earth and then, in a mighty bound,
soared abruptly. No eagle flies so high
as this necromancer's animal seems to do
effortlessly. I watched as it flew.

51 “It wheeled, tucked in its enormous wings and then
dove as a falcon would toward a duck below.
With his lance extended its rider came down and when
it did the air whistled—or it seemed so.
Gradasso was hardly aware that the denizen
of that fortress above was about to strike the blow
that came from the fixed lance, which instantly shivered,
and Gradasso then missed when he delivered

52 “a thrust into empty air, for the hippogryph
flapped its wings and rose up overhead.
But, having received most of the force of the stiff
lance, Gradasso's alfana, though spirited
sat with her cruppers on the ground as if
she'd asked someone for a chair but settled instead
for this alfresco arrangement. Meanwhile the lord
of the castle turned his flying charger toward

53 “Ruggiero, for pity's sake, who was not expecting
any attack at all, but there it was,
a blow out of nowhere. He had not been protecting
himself, intent upon Gradasso's cause.
Ruggiero turned his mount and was projecting
a counterblow, but defying all the laws
of warfare not to mention gravitation,
the hippogryph reverted to aviation.

54 “That demon on the flying horse strikes one
and then another, always avoiding their lances,
so impossibly quick is he, a phenomenon.
He wheels about in the air—indeed, he dances—

and before the knights on the ground have even begun to prepare or turn toward him to meet his advances, he has hit one's helmet and then the other's breast until the light is fading on their contest.

- 55 “The sun was going down, and in twilight they carried on, until the knight in the sky . . . You probably won't believe what I say is right or true or even possible, and I would agree with you had it not been the sight of my own eyes that beheld it. I swear by all that is holy that this marvel occurred however weird, unlikely, and even absurd.
- 56 “That warrior in the sky had covered his shield with a silken cloth, but now he removed that cover and as he did so, what we saw revealed was brilliant as any gemstone or ten times over that in brightness, and those of us on the field fell to earth like dead man at this maneuver. I lost all consciousness—I cannot say for how long. When I woke, they'd gone away.
- 57 “All of them gone, even the dwarf. My surmise was that the flying knight had taken them all and left only me behind. I rubbed my eyes as I understood that what remained of my small hopes was also gone and its demise in such a signal and spectacular fall had left me with the grief that always impends on Love as one of its various possible ends.”
- 58 The knight once more falls silent. You remember the knight is talking to Bradamante. Those quotation marks were reminders of this. But his story was quite long, and during the course of his narration,

you may have forgotten the frame. But that's all right.
He tells Bradamante his name and also his nation:
he is Count Pinabello, Anselmo's son,
of the house of Maganza. And he is an evil one.

59 But then all of them are, those Maganzese,
vicious, repulsive, and brutal. But she doesn't know
and has no reason to think he is wicked or crazy.
She listens to him, and her face changes to show
her interest in Ruggiero's fate and the ways he
traveled and was taken prisoner. Oh!
She asks him from time to time to repeat details
that are relevant, and her beautiful visage pales.

60 A plan forms instantly in her mind and she
tells him that they will venture together to save
the girl he loves (which also happens to be
where Ruggiero's a captive, but the brave
maiden makes no mention of this). "We will free
your lady," she says, and tells the knight that they've
a better chance together, if Fortune smile
upon them as together they make their trial

61 of that magician's powers. The knight replies
that he is willing, having now lost all
he cares about in the world. But is it wise,
he asks, for her to take such risks at the tall
cliff with the castle on it? To sympathize
is generous, he says, but in this brawl
there are great dangers everywhere at hand,
as in all candor he wants her to understand.

62 Bradamante is not intimidated.
The worst than can happen, she thinks is that she too
will be captured or killed if that is what is fated.
They are about to set off when someone new

appears, a messenger, very agitated.
(You must remember him, the fellow who
let Sacripant know who it was who'd knocked him down,
her gender and her name of such renown.)

63 What he has now arrived for is to say
that Montpellier and also Narbonne have fallen
and there is a great fear now in Marseilles,
which looks to her for protection. They are all in
need of her, and all the citizens pray
that she will not desert those who now call on
her strength and her wise counsel. This good courier
is pained that the news he brings will no doubt worry her,

64 but Marseilles and a great tract of the coast
from the Var to the Rhone was what the emperor gave
to Bradamante, in whom he had the most
confidence and respect as wise and brave.
Without her help the city might be lost.
Would she not therefore come at once to save
what is rightfully hers from the Castilian horde?
She looks at him but does not say a word.

65 She is torn. On the one side duty and honor
issue their clear command she cannot refuse.
On the other love speaks out and places upon her
an equal obligation. How to choose?
She opts for love and decides in the end to shun her
beleaguered Marseillaises with their pleas and excuse
herself. Their needs, though urgent, must be weighed
against those of love. She will go to Ruggiero's aid.

66 She explains as well as she can to the courier why
she cannot go with him. And then in Pinabello's
company she rides to that castle to try
her uttermost. And he? This wicked fellow's

aware now of who she is and is fashioning sly
plans for her ruin, as within him, a bellows
fans the fires of hatred, if only because
he would suffer if she knew who he was.

- 67 Let us be clear. The Maganza house and that
of Clairmont have forever been at war,
smashing each other's heads in their combat
and shedding rivers of heated blood. Therefore,
Count Pinabello will surely not hesitate at
anything, but will either betray her or
separate from her, leaving her alone
to survive as well as she can—but on her own.
- 68 So occupied is he with his wicked plans
that he loses track of where his horse is going.
That they are now lost he can tell with only a glance,
but Bradamante has no way of knowing
this as he leads her wherever his horse by chance
picks his way through the dark woods, sometimes slowing,
but then resuming its pace. And now he sees
a naked mountain peak amid the trees.
- 69 A mountain? What can you do with that? The knight
figured it might be a way of getting rid
of the girl. The sun was setting and the light
starting to fade. What Pinabello did
was suggest that they'd need shelter, and from that height
he could look down to see if there was, amid
the hills beyond, an inn. "Wait here," he said,
and started up the slope at a steady tread,
- 70 intending of course, never to see her again.
The horse made it all the way to the top, and there
he saw a quarry in the rock, and then
realizing it was deep, became aware

of possibilities he hadn't imagined when
he'd parted from Bradamante, for here was a rare
chance of the kind he had never been offered before.
Some thirty cubits down there was a door.

71 He could make out that the door gave entrance to
a room from which there shone a brilliant light,
as if in that mountain's middle one or two
torches were burning. He could not be sure quite
what it meant, or what exactly to do
to turn it somehow to his advantage when right
behind him Bradamante appeared, afraid
in the dying light of missing the tracks he'd made.

72 And there it is, easy as pie, although
why pie is easy is difficult to explain.
He has her look down in that hole so he can show
the door to her. He says its precincts contain
a beautiful maiden he glimpsed just moments ago,
clearly of noble rank and in much pain.
He would have tried to offer her help but
a man pulled her back inside and then the door shut.

73 Bradamante so far has no earthly reason
to suspect that Pinabello is a liar.
Instead she thinks there's a captive maiden and sees an
opportunity for good. A little higher
than her head there is a branch of one of the trees (an
elm, I do believe). She takes the entire
branch with a single lop of her sword. With this
one of them can descend into the abyss.

74 But which of them should go? The girl weighs less
and he is of the opinion that he's stronger.
How long can they continue this awkwardness,
even if his analysis couldn't be wronger?

In the end, she is the one to acquiesce.
She gives him the branch and, without waiting longer
begins the descent holding the branch tight.
Pinabello asks if she's all right.

75 And then he asks if she can jump or fly,
and tells her that he is of the house of Maganza,
and wishes that every one of the Clermonts could die
in one magnificent extravaganza
of suffering and mayhem. There's no goodbye
but only a falling feeling, which demands a
total concentration of the mind,
as you, if you were falling like that, would find.

76 And then? Is this the end? But surely not.
The smaller twigs of the elm branch break her fall,
as you might have guessed, with all those pages you've got
in your right hand. So this cannot be all
there is. She doesn't die here, but just what
happens to her after this close call
that leaves her on the bottom, stunned and hurt so,
we'll get to soon, perhaps in Canto Terzo.

Canto Terzo

I Who will lend me a voice or give me the right
words so as to soar as if on wings
in order that I may perform at that great height
and with the proper passion that such things
demand, for I am now about to write
praises of my great lord and master who springs
from the house of Este that most illustrious line
of rulers Heaven has given us to shine.

[Stanzas 2 through 59 omitted:

At the bottom of the hole, Bradamante finds herself at Merlin's subterranean tomb. There a sorceress prophesies about her glorious descendants of the House of Este.]

- 60 With the maiden's acquiescence the sorceress closed her book, and forthwith the parade of spirits all vanished into the cell in which were disposed Merlin's bones. Bradamante (you will recall that she had been told to be perfectly silent) posed a question: "Who were those two funereal figures between Ipollito and Alfonso, grief-stricken, all but weeping, and carrying on so?"
- 61 "Their kinfolk turned away from them, and they avoided the eyes of the others as much as they could. What are their names and fates? Can you not say?" The face of the sorceress fell and then for a good minute or two she was silent, but at last with a sigh she acknowledged them: "It must be understood that wicked men misled them, so that the pair brought to the family suffering and much care.
- 62 "But still they are of your blood and you must not allow their faults to harden your generous heart. Let justice give way to pity so that what they did is overlooked. And for my part I cannot say more. Better that they are forgot and from the procession let them stand apart as they were trying to do. Look on the bright side, as they say. (And sometimes *they* are right.)
- 63 "At first light you will come along with me by the shortest route to that castle of shining steel where Ruggiero is held captive. I shall be your guide through these most perilous woods—but we'll

be safe together until we emerge at the sea-
shore where we can relax a bit and feel
successful, at least for the moment. From there you go
onward alone toward that castle and your foe.”

- 64 All night, therefore, the maiden waited, most
of the time talking with Merlin, whose good advice
was that she try to be merciful and just
to her Ruggiero. But as they will do, the skies
brightened some in the east, and, with no time lost,
the two set out upon her enterprise,
taking an underground road that rose until
they passed through a hidden opening under a hill.
- 65 They traveled through a deep concealed ravine
no man had ever visited and passed
towering cliffs no one had ever seen.
They crossed over torrents, the waters of which ran fast
and white over jagged rocks scattered between
precipitous banks as if some child had cast
his monstrous playthings in anger into the river
in frustration perhaps or because he disliked the giver.
- 66 To pass the time on the road they chatted a bit,
which is exactly what one might expect,
exchanging friendly comments with some wit,
guessing at times as to what might be the correct
name for a certain bird or plant—but it
was mostly to warn Bradamante and protect
her from the perils she faced that the sorceress spoke
of that wizard who dwelt in the castle. He is no joke.
- 67 “If you were Pallas or Mars,” she said, “and had
more soldiers than Charlemagne and Agramant,
the odds would still be against you, for that mad
necromancer inside that arrogant

steel castle of his rides about on that bad
hippogryph that flies in extravagant
aerial maneuvers. But worse, you'll find,
is his shield with which he can render his foes blind

68 “when he uncovers it. And do not expect
that you can contrive some stratagem—to fight
with your eyes closed perhaps. How would you connect
your weapons with their target? The dazzling light,
when he removes the cover, has such an effect
as to stupefy any opponent who then is quite
defenseless and even comatose. But you
may yet succeed. I'll tell you what you must do.

69 “King Agramant of Africa has given to one
of his barons—a certain Brunello—a charmed ring
pilfered from an Indian Queen, and none
of the wizard's tricks can work or do anything
to hurt you. If you do what he has done,
you have at least a chance of prospering,
but you must somehow take it from Brunello,
who is a wicked, as well as a clever, fellow.

70 “His king—that Agramant—has sent him so
that, with the aid of this ring, he may release
Ruggiero from that fortress. Eager to go,
Brunello boasted to his lord that these
difficulties I have mentioned were no
trouble and that he would be delighted to please
his lord, who holds Ruggiero in such high
esteem. (I do not have to tell you why.)

71 “You would rather free him, would you not,
than leave it to Brunello? To you alone
Ruggiero should be grateful. I'll tell you what
you have to do: in three days' journey down

the seacoast you will come to a lonely spot
where there is an inn to which he will have gone.
How can I be sure of this? Although
I cannot explain it, believe me, it is so!

72 “He is of medium height. He has black hair
that’s curly. His skin is dark, except for his face
which is peculiarly and unhealthily fair.
His beard and eyebrows are shaggy, and he has a trace
of exophthalmia. The clothes he’ll wear
are those of a simple courier going someplace.
Speak about that magician with whom, despite
his spells, you nevertheless are determined to fight.

73 “But do not let him know that you have any
notion that he has the ring or any guess
about its powers to nullify the many
spells of the magician. Your helplessness
he’ll enjoy and find amusing, and then when he
offers to take you with him, you’ll say yes,
you’d appreciate his company and aid
in an undertaking of which you admit you’re afraid.

74 “But if he has any inkling that you are aware
of the ring, he’ll put it into his mouth and that
will make him on the instant disappear.
You’ll let him lead the way, which is just what
he would expect, but you will be so near
as to reach out and touch him. When you are at
a place where you can see the castle ahead,
you’ll stab him. And make sure that he is dead.

75 “By no means should you let pity stay your hand,
for he is an evil person, and we are so
much better off without him . . .” Just then, the strand
of the sea appeared before them—near Bordeaux

at the mouth of the Garonne. The maiden and
the sorceress wept at their parting. But there was no
time to lose: Bradamante was intent
on saving her captive lover. So off she went.

76 She gets to the inn, and right away recognizes
Brunello with whom she strikes up a conversation.
He lies of course, but this is no surprise as
she has been warned, and in reciprocation
she lies too, maintaining her disguise as
a manly knight. She keeps her faith and nation
hidden from him as well. She glances at his
hands, which are clearly those of the thief he is.

77 She does not let him sit too close to her knowing
that he could rob her and then absquatulate.
They are both of them pretending, and it is going
well enough she thinks. But there is a great
ear-splitting noise that stops their to-and-fro-ing.
What is it? I am afraid you'll have to wait.
I'll take a little break now in my song,
lest Canto Terzo run on for too long.

Canto Quarto

I Whatever you call it—lying? dissimulation?—
it doesn't sound good, but then there are times when it
brings benefits. It depends on the situation,
but some false statements are kind, and to dress up a bit
the naked truth can avoid much aggravation.
Modesty, say, doesn't make you a hypocrite,
but obviates some envy that can hurt you,
and we think of it not as a vice but as a virtue.

- 2 It takes a long time to find out who is a true friend in whom you can trust and to whom you may speak honestly. What is that maiden to do with Brunello, of whom she has heard the sorceress say he's a thief and a liar (and he dissimulates, too)? Such a person with no idea how to weigh the value of truth assumes that its main use is as a last resort for the obtuse.
- 3 So she lies too, distasteful as she may find this kind of thing, and having been alerted, she keeps an eye on his hands with his intertwined, thieving, viperous fingers. But they are diverted by a very loud noise. The donna exclaims, "O kind mother in heaven, what can this be?" Her blurted question is soon answered as everyone looks up as at an eclipse of the moon or sun.
- 4 She looks where they are staring and what she sees with her eyes her brain cannot accept. But it is obstinately there. What all of these people are gazing at that beggars the wit is a horse, but with great wings that soar with ease high in the sky or near to the ground to flit just above the turf as it pleases the knight that rides it. His luminous armor is polished bright.
- 5 And what is there for her to do but stare and watch with the others? It seems to be moving west, and it gets smaller and smaller, at least from their perspective, until, over a distant crest it disappears at last on its way somewhere else, which, as the host says, putting the best face upon it he can, is a good thing. "He makes his raids whenever he likes, and we

- 6 “can do nothing whatever. He carries away all the beautiful women he can find—which means that any pretty girl must stay inside if she wants to be safe. And humankind being what it is, there are some we’d say are no more lovely than a pig’s behind, but out of vanity they keep indoors also. It isn’t a joking matter, I know. I know.
- 7 “He has a castle up in the Pyrenees,” the innkeeper said, getting serious again, “erected by enchantment, if you please, of shining steel. Unlike anything men have ever built. And in that fortress, he’s bested valiant knights again and again. Many have gone to fight him, none of whom has ever returned—all captive, we assume,
- 8 “or more probably dead.” The lady hears but she remembers the ring that she will have, which is enough, almost, to calm her fears. “Can you supply a servant who is brave and can take me to this castle?” (Brunello’s ears perk up at this.) “For I am resolved to save people inside it. My mind is set upon this deed. A guide and a horse, and I am gone.”
- 9 “I will be your guide,” Brunello says, “for I know the way and have directions in writing, as well as other things that, in their ways, may prove to be useful.” His terms are inviting if unspecific—she knows he does not raise the subject of the ring, a deliberate slighting that she of course expects. She is agreed and says she would be grateful if he’d lead.

- 10 In the stable of the innkeeper there is
an impressive horse that takes her fancy, fit
for battles and long journeys, and to his
delight she makes a generous offer for it.
At dawn the next day, as soon as the sun has risen,
she is on her way with Brunello a bit
behind or just ahead as the two of them travel
through field and forest and over grass and gravel.
- 11 They ascend the Pyrenees and reach a height
from which one can see—assuming the air is clear—
both France and Spain and also enjoy the sight
of two separate shores, as it is possible here
in Italy in the Apennines where one might
see the Slavonian and Tuscan seas from near
high Camoldoli, where the good monks own a
great deal of land close to the peak of Feltrona.
- 12 From there they descend by a difficult path to a deep
valley that has in its center a high plateau
that towers into the heavens with its steep
walls no one could think of climbing, although
there are, at the acme, walls of steel to keep
intruders out. Brunello exclaims, “Lo,
this is where the sorcerer hides his knights
and ladies, on top of those unassailable heights.”
- 13 The curtain walls rise flush, four square and sheer
as if a joiner or a master mason had cut
them. There is no path or stairway where
one can gain access to the castle, but
a bird or flying beast could well live there
quite secure from any danger that
might live so far below—and seem so small—
as not to be feared, or prompt any notice at all.

- 14 The time had now arrived, the maiden saw,
when she should take the ring and do away
with this Brunello fellow, this sapinpaw,
but then she asked herself if she should slay
a man of such little account. It stuck in her craw,
and therefore she surprised him, and after they
had struggled briefly, she bound him and tied him to
a nearby pine. It seemed the right thing to do,
- 15 riskier but more humane. She took
the priceless ring from his finger. He complained,
wept, and pleaded, trying by hook or crook
to get her to give it back, but she remained
steadfast. She left him there by the tree and struck
out for the castle, descending to the plain
where, at the base of the crag, she blew a loud
blast of her horn to summon the wicked and proud
- 16 magician to come out and fight, and he
did soon enough, appearing from a gate
on the wingèd steed that she expected to see.
It flew through the air, soared, and dove in great
swoops at what its rider took to be
a man—a knight who was wearing armor plate.
What surprised her was that he had come to face
a foe but bore no lance or sword or mace.
- 17 In his left hand he carried only a shield
draped in red silk, and, in his right, a book
at which he sometimes glanced for it to yield
charms and spells so that at different moments he took
different forms: he could seem to cross the field
with a lance in the crook of his arm, but then she'd look
again and it was a mace or an épée—
but none of his passes touched her in any way.

- 18 The horse, however, was not a figment; he was sired by a gryphon on a mare. He had his father's feathery plumage and the wings, forefeet, and the head and beak. Elsewhere he was a horse, like any fine horse you'd see. Such beasts these days have become extremely rare, but they come from the Rifean hills in the Urals, far away from where most civilized people are.
- 19 Thence, the magician, by his incantations, had abducted him and, back home with much skill and care, and also by his demonstrations of kindnesses had trained the beast until it could perform maneuvers in combinations in perfect conformity to its rider's will in the air or on the ground. But everything else beside that horse was trickery and spells.
- 20 He could make yellow pass for red, and would have taken in Bradamante with one illusion after another, but with the ring she could see through to the truth. But to produce confusion in him she slashed at the empty air in a good simulation of blindness. Her execution of equestrian turns and charges seemed blind too (which was just what she had been instructed to do).
- 21 After fighting on horseback for a while she decided to dismount so she could better carry out the strategy of the guileful sorceress and follow to the letter her instructions. The magician flashed a smile and resorted to his ultimate weapon. "Let her cope, if she can, with my dazzling shield," he said to himself. "It will render her either senseless or dead."

- 22 And why, you ask, had he not done this before?
Because he was playful and heartless like a cat
that toys with its prey and therefore derives more
entertainment from the kill. When that
loses most of its charm and begins to bore,
she dispatches it at last. But this time, what
he didn't know was that he was the mouse and she,
with the ring, was the cat, enjoying her devilry.
- 23 She was quite amused by this charade
and when she saw that he had taken the red
cloth from the shield, she fell down and played
dead like a fox and in this way misled
her adversary so he might not be afraid
to dismount and approach. She put her head
on the ground and his horse circled once and landed.
Through her half closed eyes, she watched as the man did
- 24 just what she had expected he would, leaving
the shield behind as he came for the knight on the ground,
who, like a sly wolf in a thicket, deceiving
the naïve goat, waited, and then, in a bound,
arose and seized him tightly, thereby achieving
her entire purpose, because without the astound-
ing volume that was doing the fighting, he
was approaching with his bonds of captivity,
- 25 a chain he carried for just that purpose. But
soon she had him on the ground, which makes
good sense, considering that he was old and not
particularly strong for heaven's sakes.
She is about to cut off his caput
but with his age and helplessness, he makes
a pitiable picture, with wispy gray
hair. He's seventy if he is a day.

- 26 How far does vengeance go, and where should pity intervene? These are questions each of us must face, and every man and city makes up its own rules. But I will not preach. All we know is how she looks at it. He has a face in which the many wrinkles pleach into a very sad expression. Can she hurt an old man so sunk in misery?
- 27 She raises her victorious hand about to strike, but then has second thoughts. Her blade stays still in the air. She hears the old man shout, “Do it, in God’s name! I am not afraid, but only wish to be done with life. Put me out of my misery.” Surprised by this, the maid asks who he is and why it was he built that fortress above them of wickedness and guilt,
- 28 and an outrage to all the world. “I did not do it with any wicked intent,” the old man says. “And I am no greedy robber—I swear to it. It is only love that has prompted me all my days, and my hope was to save a gentle knight. I knew it would come about when someone he trusts betrays him and as a Christian he will die. My hope was to protect him, or at least try.
- 29 “Nowhere that the sun shines on our planet between here and the frozen southern pole will you ever find so true or handsome a man, it seems to me, and I say I know his soul for I raised him myself. When this war began it was from his love of honor that his goal was to serve King Agramant and come to France. He is Ruggiero. You’ve heard of him, perchance.

- 30 “My name is Atlas and, more than most fathers would,
I’ve loved him as a son, and my object has been
only to keep him from France and danger, a good
purpose, I think. And I have held him in
that castle towering over us where he could
be secure. But the others? With some chagrin
I confess I took them for his sake so he
might have some company and avoid ennui.
- 31 “It is, indeed, a pleasant life they lead,
as long as they do not try to get away.
Every delight that anyone might need
I provide in great abundance, and all day,
dressed to the nines, they sing and dance. They feed
on the rarest viands and drink fine wines that they
appreciate. There is nothing left to want,
nothing to dream of that I do not grant.
- 32 “It was, I think, a good and generous plan,
and my motives were the best, you must admit.
Ruggiero was a safe and happy man,
and all his companions lived in luxury. It
was very nearly perfect, but nothing can
endure forever. My good will and wit
and all my work you frustrate and undo.
I am defeated, but I appeal to you,
- 33 “if your heart is no less noble than your face,
what I have done for him do not destroy.
Take my splendid shield (in any case,
I give it to you freely). And enjoy
my wonderfully trained hippogryph to chase
through the air like an eagle. But leave me my boy
and the castle and perhaps a friend or two.
Or just leave him and take the entire crew.

- 34 “But if you refuse my earnest plea, I entreat
that before you lead him away to France and peril,
you separate my soul from its rotting meat,
for I have no further wish to live in a sterile
and barren world.” The girl waited a beat
and then replied, “I plan to free the virile
hero, whatever you say. And do not consign
a shield and a horse to me that are already mine.
- 35 “But even if it were in your power to give
these things in exchange, it still would not make sense,
for you say you hold Ruggiero so he may live
and avoid his fate. But I would ask you whence
this knowledge of yours comes. Is it speculative?
If it were certain and sure, then by no immense
efforts could anyone save him from what he
must face, in what you suppose is destiny.
- 36 “What good are you anyway as a soothsayer,
if you cannot foretell your own future? And don’t
ask me to kill you. It is a ridiculous prayer.
If you wanted to die, you could kill yourself, but you won’t.
Before you go though, open the gates up there,
and release the captives from your pretentious haunt.”
So saying, she prodded Atlas and made him go
toward the castle’s rock and its entrance somewhere below.
- 37 He is in chains and very close, but still
she does not trust him, although he does appear
abject and quite obedient to her will.
She leads him along until at the base of the sheer
wall in a fissure there are narrow steps in the hill
that spiral upward until, at the top, they near
a gate with various letters and signs engraved
on the flanking posts and Corinthian architrave.

- 38 From the threshold there, Atlas lifts a rock
that covers a pair of huge cauldrons called *olle*
that have within them fire and from which smoke
drifts up and in the air disappears slowly.
With the rock he breaks the pots with a savage knock
and instantly the top of the hill is wholly
vacant as though no castle had been there,
for it has disappeared into thin air.
- 39 Then, like a thrush some fowler was lucky to catch
in his net, the magician contrives to extricate
himself from the bonds of the lady's chains and . . . Watch!
He, too, disappears. And at what was the gate,
all the knights and ladies now approach,
free at last. But this sudden turn of fate
and freedom leaves a few unsatisfied
and regretting the loss of the luxuries inside.
- 40 There are Gradasso and Sacripant, and there
is Prasildo, who came with Rinaldo from the East,
and also Iroldo, another friend, and the fair
Bradamante sees Ruggiero. Her eyes feast
on him, and in return his delighted stare
is altogether welcome to her. At least
he is alive—and she can feel that his heart
still burns with a great passion, which, on her part
- 41 she reciprocates. He has loved her from
the time she took her helmet off for him,
and as a result was wounded. (How and by whom,
it would take far too long to tell.) To the dim
recesses of the forests they would come
seeking each other, but through a cruel whim
of fate, missing each other again and again
until now. He is the happiest of men,

- 42 for she has saved him, she alone, and he
is full of love and gratitude. They all
descend the stairway in the cliff and see
the place where she fought Atlas—and you will recall
there was a shield and a hippogryph that we
heard her claim as prizes. The animal
and shield are still there, the latter with its red
cover on. She approaches the horse's head
- 43 to take the reins, as anybody might.
It lets her come fairly close, but then flutters away
alighting halfway up the hill. It's quite
annoying, but skittish horses can be that way.
She follows after him; he makes a slight
retreat and stops again—as a crow might play
with a foolish dog, leading it down the beach
always tempting but always out of reach.
- 44 It isn't only Bradamante who chases
the hippogryph, but all the rest join in,
Sacripant and Gradasso darting places
the horse might come to or where it has just been.
Up and down the hill the animal races,
and then it slows to let Ruggiero win.
(It's doing this at Atlas's command
who still has plans for the knight, you understand.)
- 45 Atlas, you will recall, is eager to
protect Ruggiero, and with his flying beast
he has figured out a way that he can do
exactly that—if not by himself at least
by having it avoid the rest of the crew
but allow Ruggiero who thinks he has been released
to seize its reins and try to lead it, but
the animal plants its hoofs and it stays put.

- 46 Ruggiero then gets down from Frontino (his charger, as you will have guessed) and he mounts the stubborn hippogryph but this is not such a great idea, for it happens to be just what Atlas in all his artifice expects. At the touch of the spurs, with alacrity the beast rises up into the sky like a good falcon whose master has just removed its hood.
- 47 Bradamante, astonished, sees them take off and rise, vertiginous, into the sky. She thinks of Ganymede who thus was plucked up by the rough hand of Zeus to Olympus, to serve the drinks. Will Ruggiero be taken there too? Or fall on his duff? Either way she is terrified. She blinks, as he gets ever higher and smaller and by and by disappears into an empty sky.
- 48 Meanwhile, there on the ground is Frontino, a fine horse, and his, and it would be a shame to leave it to anyone who might take a shine to a riderless horse. Thus, to preserve his claim, she decides to take it with her for the benign purpose of giving it back to him, an aim she hopes to achieve when they are reunited—and he and she and the horse will all be delighted.
- 49 And he? Up into the central blue, he rises higher and faster. He cannot control the flight of the animal which perhaps is not a surprise, as, looking down, he finds he is out of sight of that hill from which they started. He surmises the beast will go where it wants. At a giddy height it surges ahead like a boat with a fresh wind blowing into its sails to speed it where it is going.

50 They are traveling west, he believes, or into the sun,
which is all he can make out. The ground is a brown
blur, and he can't tell, although it is fun
to fly along this way (if you don't look down).
And we may as well leave him there with our benison.
We shall get back to him soon enough. (Don't frown!)
To the paladin Rinaldo we now return.
What's going on with him? Ah, let us learn!

51 He's on a ship, remember, blown by the storm
that takes him hither and thither, and sometimes yon,
day and night, to the south and into the warm
tropics, and then, back north to gaze upon
icebergs and whales until at last he is borne
to the wooded Scottish coastline, whereupon
they anchor where many famous knights have found
honor and death. Their great names still resound:

52 Galahad, Lancelot, Gawain, Arthur, and
others of the Tables (old and new).
Monuments of their great exploits still stand.
Rinaldo gets his armor and Bayard, too,
ready to disembark. They are on the strand
in a pleasant patch of shade, when he tells the crew
and master to go to Berwick and wait there
where he will meet them. And he bids them fare-

53 well, and turns into the forest alone,
without a squire or any companion. He
follows one path and then another, unknown
but promising . . . Of what? What chivalry
always wants is adventure! (Do not groan.)
And after some little while, what does he see
but a convenient abbey where the good monks vie
to serve all the knights and ladies who pass by.

- 54 The monks greet him with warmth and food and wine,
and it is a set scene we don't have to do,
with the long trestle tables, and many fine
victuals on huge salvers coming through
the boisterous hall. But then, after they dine,
Rinaldo turns to the abbot and poses to
him the great question: "Where in these lands can I go
for feats that will earn me either honor or woe?"
- 55 The abbot gives him reasonable advice,
for he is very wise, and what he says
is that adventure, for itself, is nice,
but if what the knight is looking for is praise,
he ought to avoid places where the eyes
of mankind never turn. The golden rays
of fame do not arise from an obscure
exploit—howsoever brave and pure.
- 56 This seems to be a reasonable position,
and they discuss among themselves the many
choices there are for one of his ambition.
What should Rinaldo try to accomplish when he
leaves the abbey? There is the sad condition
of the daughter of the king who could use any
help from a champion now, if she could find
a valorous knight who might be so inclined.
- 57 "Lurcanio, a mean baron, more
out of vindictiveness than any respect
for the law, has told the court that just before
midnight he saw her in an incorrect
rendezvous with a lover—and therefore
she must be burned at the stake (What do you expect
in a country like this?) unless a champion try
Lurcanio in combat and give him the lie.

- 58 “Absurd, of course, but it turns out not to be a joke. The law indeed is very clear that for a woman of any rank, if she is ever accused in this way, the statutes here require that she must die. This penalty she faces within a month—and we are near the end of that. But you could be her savior and fight, and thus exculpate her behavior.”
- 59 This is what they tell him, and he is amazed that such things are permitted to happen. But still it is an opportunity of a crazed and desperate kind. And he has a role to fill. He can earn that glory and be praised which is, he believes, his destiny. He will vindicate her. His duty and his trust is to fight victoriously for truth and justice.
- 60 Her name turns out to be Guinevere, and the king her father has proclaimed throughout the land that whosoever shall come and do this thing and save the life of the princess shall have her hand in marriage (that is, assuming he shall bring a pedigree her station must demand), and a suitable estate shall be supplied as dower for the bridegroom and the bride.
- 61 “But if,” the abbot explained, “no one appears to champion her cause within the time allotted, she will—as the kingdom fears—be burned at the stake for her alleged crime. Better then that you should prevent the tears of her father and thereby earn for yourself a sublime position of honor than wander around in the wood looking for some obscure way to do good.

- 62 “She is, I ought to add, exceedingly fair,
and you will find no lovelier girl betwixt
the Indus and the Atlantic pillars. There
is also her great wealth and rank that are mixed
into the pleasant potion, if you care
for practical rewards. You’ll be well fixed
as the favorite of the king, having redeemed
his honor and hers as well.” The abbot beamed
- 63 and added, almost as an afterthought,
“I do believe her chastity is not
lost or compromised, and so you ought
to have no compunctions on that score, sir.” What
Rinaldo answered was, “What I was taught
was that such legislation as you have got
is totally wrong-headed. Did she give
comfort to a lover and let him live
- 64 “in bliss? And should she die for such a cause?
Should it not be the other way around—
that for the woman who is cruel, the laws
should be severe. Is that idea not sound?
Does Guinevere’s behavior give me pause,
then? Certainly not! In such affairs, I’ve found
courtesy is desirable. Her accuser
should have kept silent. And he will be the loser.
- 65 “But did she do anything? I have no idea,
and it doesn’t matter to me. I cannot say,
not wishing to utter an untruth. But I see a
case in which the punishment that they
propose is utter madness. He must be a
lunatic who wrote the law this way.
The law should be repealed at once and a new
and better one set down, I think. Don’t you?

- 66 “If the same ardor moves both men and women to the sweetnesses of love, it is unfair that women should be punished for being human once, while men are praised as debonair for doing it as often as they can do. Man and woman should be treated the same. I declare that I mean, with the help of God, to right this wrong that is so outrageous and has gone on so long.”
- 67 With what Rinaldo had said, everyone in the hall agreed enthusiastically—that the tradition was wrong and had been allowed to stand for all these many years. And that the women’s condition should be corrected. It would not be a tall order for the king, of his own volition, to correct this great injustice and thus do good for everyone. He could and certainly should.
- 68 When the rosy dawn illuminated the earth Rinaldo put on his armor and untied Bayard so that they could travel forth. The abbey provided a squire as a guide (he knew these fearsome forests of the north). And off they went, their confidence high, to ride to the city where the unhappy maiden’s trial would happen, and they progressed, mile after mile.
- 69 To make even better time, they decide to leave the main road for a less used but more direct path, and as they travel, would you believe that there is a shriek? One must always expect damsels in distress, after all, and we’ve got one here. Two villains and an abject and defenseless girl, which is a terrible pity, especially considering that she’s pretty

- 70 even though her eyes are red with crying,
and in as much distress as damsels get.
The two bad guys have their swords drawn and are trying
to stain the green grass red with her blood. She yet
prays and implores, blubbering and sighing,
but to no effect. Rinaldo responds to this threat
and with loud cries he enters upon the scene,
delighted at this chance to intervene.
- 71 The vartlets flee, as they almost always do,
into the woods to hide. The paladin
does not bother to follow, but he turns to
the woman to ask what kind of trouble she's in.
But because they are in a hurry, to save a few
minutes, he has his squire, who has been
obliging, help the lady onto his horse,
and, as they ride they'll continue their discourse.
- 72 She is beautiful indeed, and has refined
speech and manners. He invites her again
to tell her story. She answers from behind
the squire. But what she tells them then
about what happened to her, if you don't mind,
we may put off for a little while, and when
my energy returns we shall get into
the next piece, which I think is Canto Quinto.

Canto Quinto

- 1 For all other creatures on earth, there is a rule
that the male and female of the species live
in harmony and peace with each other. You'll
never find a bear in the woods that will give

grief to a she-bear or a lion who'll
attack a lioness, or a combative
wolf and she-wolf. Bulls and heifers too
behave themselves as, indeed, they ought to do.

- 2 But Megara, the cruel fury, has come
to trouble human hearts, and husband and wife
can be heard very late at night engaged in dumb
quarrels, yelling in unending strife,
and bathing their marriage beds in tears for some
trivial reason that, upon my life,
I cannot fathom. Or, worse than tears, it could
well be that in their battles they shed blood.
- 3 The only conclusion then is that man's actions
are contrary to nature and God as well
when he perpetrates against woman such malefactions
as poisoning, hanging, or stabbing some mademoiselle.
I'd say that the one who commits such vile infractions
is not a man but a spirit straight from hell
that has appeared in human form. But we,
can infer from what they have done, what they must be.
- 4 Such were that pair of thieves Rinaldo drove
away from the girl whom they had led into
that most conveniently deserted grove
from which no news of her plight would get through
to the rest of the world. And that was where, above,
I paused, as she was just about to review
her history to the friendly paladin. Now,
she may continue, if you will allow.
- 5 "I shall tell you," she said, "of greater and worse
crimes than Greek tragedians ever recorded,
and if the sun itself appears averse
to visiting here in the north, it's because of such sordid

and vile behavior as I am about to rehearse.
If men may kill their enemies in war, did
you ever hear of men killing friends who try
to do them only good? Does that not defy

- 6 “all notions of justice? But let me begin, my lord,
at the beginning, from the time when I first came
into the king’s daughter’s service. You’ve heard
of Guinevere, I should think: that is her name.
I had a fine place at court, but what occurred
was that cruel Love staked his peremptory claim
upon my heart. I was, I admit, possessed,
and Polinesso seemed to me much the best
- 7 “and handsomest of all the men—the Duke
of Albany. I loved him. His speech was breezy,
and faces are there to be judged at a single look,
but of hearts how can we make analyses? He
came at last to my bed in the room I took—
Guinevere’s of course. It makes me queasy
even now to admit how, time after time,
up to her balcony Polinesso would climb!
- 8 “This is where she often slept but now
and then she would change rooms, to avoid the heat
of summer or winter’s cold, and that was how
the room could be ours and we were able to meet
with the help of a rope ladder that would allow
him easy access. It was out of the way, discreet,
on the side of the palace facing dilapidated
outbuildings where no one went or waited.
- 9 “We met for months: no one ever suspected,
and I so burned with love that I was blind
to the tell-tale signs that his passion was affected
and not an honest expression of his mind

and heart and soul. Those dots I never connected that would have drawn a picture in which I'd find the truth. Someone with more sophistication might well have seen through his tergiversation.

10 “Who knows how long I might have continued believing in the lies that both of us found convenient, had he not revealed directly that he'd been deceiving me by a suggestion that drove me mad—that I should now help in a plan of his conceiving to attract my mistress Guinevere. This bad man was in love with her, he claimed, and I could further his suit and help him catch her eye.

11 “Outrage? No. Disgust? Say, rather, dismay—that people, or at least some men, are like that, the fly we find in the perfumed ointment, say. I listened to him go on, explaining what he wanted, which was to marry her but stay with me as well. He said he loved me, but he had rank and wealth. So his design was for me to be his mistress or concubine.

12 “Men are villains, you see, but women are sad fools, or, anyway, I was: I believed that what he said might be true—for I was mad with love and hoped that what he had conceived might make a kind of sense, for when he had the king as his father-in-law and had achieved all his goals, we might find happiness that could somehow outweigh my deep tristesse.

13 “And aside from his love for me, which he declared over and over had not diminished, he spoke of how grateful he would be if I cared enough for him to do this thing, and I'd see

many proofs of his passion. I was scared
and confused and in love enough at last to agree
to speak of him to Guinevere and praise
him and further his suit in many ways.

- 14 “How could I deny him anything
or refuse to do as he asked? I was happiest
when I could please him. Therefore I tried to bring
the two of them together at his behest.
I did all I could think of, encouraging
her to take some notice or interest
in him, but to no avail. For all my bother,
her heart was taken elsewhere, by another.
- 15 “This was a gentle knight, a courteous, handsome
fellow who had come to Scotland from far-
off Italy, who’d learned how to fight, and some
people considered him matchless in arms (and they are
excellent judges, from whom to command some
praise like this is rare). He was on a par
with the very best we have in Britain or
anywhere else in the noble arts of war.
- 16 “He and a brother of his had come while young
to live in the court here, improve their skill,
and attain a certain refinement by living among
our lords and ladies. He’d earned the king’s good will
and, I might say, his love, as, rung by rung,
the monarch had raised him up—as monarchs will—
giving to him a number of towns and farms
and titles, too, with elaborate coats of arms.
- 17 “The name of this valiant knight was Ariodante,
and as dear as he was to the king, he was even dearer
to Guinevere, his daughter. Not only puissant, he
was also in love with her. Their hearts drew nearer,

burning as hot as Aetna's significant eruptions do. I cannot be any clearer, but take it as a given that they were both in love as if they had already plighted their troth.

18 “This love for him that filled her heart prevented her from looking elsewhere or hearing a word I said to her, for she was most contented with Ariodante, and it never occurred to her to look at the duke I'd represented as handsome and charming—one she might have preferred to her knight. But the more I tried, the more annoyed she got. She said I was a bore.

19 “I told my lover—but he refused to hear—that her heart was otherwise engaged, and she would not respond to his suit. It was quite clear that there was not enough water in the sea to quench her ardor. For us to persevere was absolutely hopeless for him and me. Polinesso's mood thereupon became grim for he hated what I'd just reported to him.

20 “That hatred only grew and it took over his entire being, for he was very proud and could not bear it that some other lover might be preferred to him. Therefore he vowed that he would be revenged and she would discover that he was a man of consequence—a cloud on her horizon and on her gallant's too, and they would suffer much from what he would do.

21 “He said that he would sow discord between the two and make them hate each other so that they would feel toward one another keen enmity and shame. He would bring her low

and visit disgrace upon her with a scene
so sordid, shameful, and public that there'd be no
living it down. What this scheme would be,
though it made him smile, he would not confide to me.

22 “He brooded for some time about the small
details, and then when he was ready said
what he wanted me to do, and I was all
loving and loyal and probably out of my head,
but there I was, I confess, at his beck and call.
'Dalinda,' he whispered (and I was filled with dread),
'a tree that one cuts down will revive and then
one has to cut it down again and again.

23 ““This is what I must do, and I will do it,
until the roots are exhausted and it can not
grow back again, after what has happened to it.
It is to my taste, or say my hunger that
this elegant scheme be carried out, and through it
she will be ruined by my intricate plot.
What I want from you, next time we meet,
is the clothing Guinevere lets drop to her feet

24 ““as she undresses for bed. You gather and bring
them with you and put them on for our rendezvous.
Dress your hair like hers. Do everything
you can to appear to be she. And then when you
are up on our balcony, I'll be imagining
her letting the ladder down to do
as we have done, on many and many a day—
so that my desire for her may fade away.’

25 “I thought it suspicious and even a bit demeaning,
but I did not see through to the fraud he had in mind.
I wanted to believe that he was weaning
himself away from his passion for her. We find

all too often, from duchesses to cleaning women in love, that we can be willfully blind to how men are behaving and make excuses for them. We can be very silly gooses.

- 26 “At any rate, he was at the same time speaking with Ariodante, with whom he once had been friends. He represented that he had been seeking Guinevere’s hand in marriage and that they were in love. Why was a so-called friend thus sneaking around to interfere or trying to win Guinevere’s heart? Is this a way to behave unless one is a villain or a knave?”
- 27 “He asked why Ariodante pursued this vain courtship that could not possibly succeed and would only bring to all the parties pain. ‘If I were in your place, I should not need any such prompting but would of course refrain without the friend having to come and plead for me to conduct myself in a proper way. And on this subject that’s all I have to say.’”
- 28 “Ariodante answered the Duke thus; ‘I am astonished also, and even before you’d laid eyes on the girl, there was between us two a love that could not have been any more ardent or sweeter or any more rapturous. She does not love you, and I therefore implore you, who must know this as well as I do, to yield the girl to me and, in honor, quit the field.’”
- 29 ““That is what I would do, and if you had that regard for me that you claim I should show, then why should I be the one to excuse myself? It is sad to have to say it, but between the two of us, I

am the one she loves and expects to marry. Her dad,
the king, loves me as well and has looked on my
suit with favor. Believe me, my friend, it's true,
for I would not, for our friendship, lie to you.'

30 "This, of course, was just as the Duke had planned,
and he was now able to offer the reply
he had prepared, but it seemed to be off-hand
when he said, 'My friend you are in error and I
am the one she loves, although I understand
how passion can deceive one, but let us try
to reason it out and be candid with one another,
keep nothing secret, and act as brother to brother.

31 "What I reveal to you, or you to me,
we must swear never to tell another soul,
for only such an oath will allow us to be
as honest as we must be to settle this whole
dispute between us. And if you will agree,
I think that we can navigate this shoal
without mishap and not risk having the great
friendship that is between us deteriorate.'

32 "How reasonable! How fair! Or so it appeared.
They took their oaths on the gospel and Ariodante,
suspecting nothing, began. He volunteered
how he and Guinevere had a covenant he
trusted absolutely and he revered
the girl for her promise (in which he was confident, he
said) that if her father had any objection
to their marriage, she would still preserve her affection

33 "for him, never marry another, but would
live alone for the rest of her earthly days.
But he was hopeful that by his valor he could
gain the king's approval and his praise.

His object was to do the kingdom good
and thus to earn the princess by these affrays.
'Only the brave deserve the fair,' it is said,
and he trusted in that, and believed that they would wed.

34 "Everything he said, of course, was true,
and he had no need whatever for persiflage.
He had no doubts at all about her and knew
that nothing the other could say could camouflage
or in any way disfigure their strong and true
love. Secure, he waited for a barrage
of utter nonsense from Polinesso, who'd
have no chance of shaking his certitude.

35 "After a pause, he admitted that that was the whole
story. He had no other proofs or need
for any. He had expected none from a soul
as pure and fine as hers. He said that he'd
be content to wait until their goal
of holy wedlock was reached—as God decreed.
To ask for anything further would be wrong,
although he hoped the wait would not be too long.

36 "All this the duke had pretty much expected,
and it must have satisfied his bitter spite
to answer with a carefully affected
display of regret, 'No, no, my friend, not quite!'
His plan was to make him feel not only rejected
but furious. 'I am ahead of you in delight.
She only pretends with you, but with me it's true—
not just in words but in acts of passion too.

37 "With you, I am sorry to say, she is pretending,
leading you on, and feeding you false hope,
while with me, in our intimate and unending
conversations, she says you are a dope,

and mocks you, even as I am defending
your character and brains. You should not mope
on her account but make a nice clean break.
You think it's love, but you make a grave mistake.

- 38 “Had we not sworn an oath, I would not say
how often it is that Guinevere and I
lie naked in her bed, and while we play
she speaks of you in mirth and ribaldry,
which adds a certain zest to our soufflé.
Her actions, I'm sorry to say, thus give the lie
to what she has said to you in cruel fun.
Look elsewhere, my dear friend, at anyone!
- 39 “To this Ariodante answered at once,
'I do not believe a word you have said. I'm sure
you're lying through your teeth. I'm not a dunce
or oaf, and I know that Guinevere is pure
as the driven snow in sunlight. For these affronts
to decency and to her, the only cure
is that you take them back, or else must prove
what you have said about the woman I love.'
- 40 “Here Ariodante is surprised, for the duke
says, 'It is not fit that we engage
in combat over something where a look
is enough to demonstrate what I've said and assuage
us in our troubles.' This was an offer that shook
Ariodante's confidence, and his rage
turned for a moment to fear. Could it be true?
and if it was, what on earth could he do?
- 41 “His life, he thought, might end right then and there,
in chagrin or grief or apoplexy. His face
was ashen a moment. 'Let me see this rare
good fortune of yours,' he said, 'and I'll yield my place

to you in this contest between a pair
of knights.’ But then, in order to save face,
he said, ‘I won’t believe it, I emphasize,
until I have seen it myself with my own eyes.’

- 42 “When the time is right, I shall let you know,’
Polinesso said, and went away, suppressing
a hearty horse-laugh, I dare say, although
perhaps he smiled. (I am, as you know, guessing.)
A couple of nights later, the cruel tableau
took place with me quite innocently dressing,
as the duke had instructed me, in Guinevere’s clothing
while Ariodante was hiding, in fear and loathing,
- 43 “where the duke had told him, among those derelict
buildings, where nobody ever goes, but from whence
one can observe that balcony we’d picked
for our many trysts. Ariodante was tense,
worried lest the bad duke might have tricked
him into coming here in malevolence—
to murder him. Otherwise he had no fear
about any misbehavior of Guinevere.
- 44 “As a precaution, Ariodante had brought
his brother along—Lurcanio is his name—
prudent and brave. Nobody better had fought
on the battlefield or at tournaments. He came
for protection, and Ariodante dreaded naught,
for having his brother along with him was the same
as having ten men standing beside him to fight
in this out-of-the-way place in the dead of night.
- 45 “To his brother, of course, he had not said a thing
about the purpose of their nocturnal foray,
but had only instructed Lurcanio to bring
his weapons with him and stand a stone’s throw away,

ready to come if called, and lingering
until Ariodante dismissed him. They
concealed themselves in those outbuildings and waited,
not at all certain what they anticipated.

46 “The brother promised that he would do as told,
and they bided their time in the darkness opposite
the balcony. Eventually the bold
and deceitful man showed up, whose clever wit
was now in the service of a cruel and cold
heart—although I was unaware of it.
He made the usual sign to me and I
appeared with the ladder that he could climb up by.

47 “I had dressed myself in Guinevere’s long white
gown with gold embroidery everywhere,
and there was a lovely cloth-of-gold net, bright
with crimson tassels, that I wore on my hair.
Everyone knew that costume of hers, all right.
It was hardly something anyone else would wear,
but I had it on as I went out there, visible
to anybody below. It was almost risible.

48 “Lurcanio, meanwhile, had disobeyed
and followed after his brother, silent but close,
and curious, I should think. Somewhere in the shade
of a wall, he stood well hidden, prepared for foes
or anything else. I appeared at the balustrade
and they saw me in the moonlight. Only God knows
whether they doubted Guinevere yet. I guess so,
but the next thing that they saw was Polinesso,

49 “ready, apparently, for his assignation
with the woman up there who seemed to be Guinevere.
At this point the brothers’ horror and consternation
was such that they were ready, I do fear,

to believe their eyes, for the duke, with no hesitation
at all climbed up the ladder and in a mere
matter of seconds held me in close embrace
while kissing my mouth and neck and every place

- 50 “at once so as to drive his victim mad.
I was ardent myself, altogether unaware
that we were being observed. It was very bad,
but it was not at all my purpose to drive to despair
Ariodante—who watched this terrible cad
embracing and being in turn embraced by the fair
Guinevere. How could this happen? Was he nuts?
Or were all women always and everywhere sluts?
- 51 “So what does he do, do you think? He cannot bear
such a world, such a life, and he wants to end it all
immediately. In his absolute despair
he plants his sword on the ground, blade-up, to fall
upon it and let the hardened steel take care
of his misery forever after a small
moment of discomfort. But his brother sees
what he is about to do and he’s
- 52 “there to prevent such sin, such madness. Had he
been that stone’s throw away, he could never have come
to interfere. And in the event, he was glad he
had not followed all the instructions, as some
might have done. He said (being Scottish), ‘Laddie,
I know it is a shock to recover from,
but do not kill yourself for a girl! Hoot mon!
It’s better to find out now than later on.
- 53 “If anyone is to be killed, it should be she,
for she is the one who is guilty. If you must die
let it be for honor . . . and let it be
later, rather than now. With your own eye,

you've seen what a filthy whore she is, and he has done you a kind of favor. Quite frankly, my advice is that we take this matter to the king who, in such cases, knows what to do.'

- 54 "Ariodante stays his hand. Anyway he appears to do so. His heart nevertheless is pierced by how he has seen his beloved betray her promises in flagrant lasciviousness. Stunned, disoriented, and in dismay, he follows his brother away from this wickedness. But his deference to his brother's advice is a lie, for his life is over and all he wants is to die.
- 55 "The next morning Ariodante was gone, having slipped away, guided by despair and disgust, and for many days there was no one who had any idea what had happened to him or where he could possibly be. And what had set him upon this desperate path, the only people there who knew were the duke and of course his brother, who'd heard the rumors and speculations but said not a word.
- 56 "After a week, or I think it was probably eight days, a traveler came with terrible news for Guinevere and the others at court of the fate of Ariodante who had elected to lose the life he detested, jumping down from a great height into the turbulent sea that subdues even the strongest swimmer. In short, this renowned knight had bidden farewell to the world and drowned.
- 57 "But there was more and worse for the sad princess, for the man said, 'We met on the road by chance, and he invited me to come with him. My guess was that he wanted company, but his utterance

had quite another meaning, which I confess
I never suspected. 'Report the circumstance
of my death,' he said, 'to Guinevere, who will know
why I have done this, having been brought so low.

58 "What you see me do will be no great surprise
to her. You can merely say that I'd have preferred
not to have seen what I saw, or not to have eyes.'
Other than that, he offered not a word
of explanation, although I can surmise
what he might have meant.' When Guinevere heard
this speech her face turned ashen and she burst
into tears, but this was not the very worst,

59 "for he did not stop there but went on to tell
what happened, and how at Capobasso he saw
Ariodante jump from the cliff. He fell
headlong to the rocks and water, into the craw
of the man-devouring sea, where it's just as well
that he must have died at once. 'In fear and awe
I have come here at full speed to tell his story,
as he instructed. I am truly sorry.'

60 "O God, what she said then, and what she did.
She went to her faithful bed and beat her breast,
tore her hair and clothing, and she hid
from everyone at court—who probably guessed
the reason he'd killed himself, which—God forbid!—
was wrong, crazy, and false! And she expressed
her grief and rage in heartbreakingly keen
wailing—for what could Ariodante have seen?

61 "Rumors ran rife, and the king himself cried
as everyone else at court did, pouring tears.
down their faces. The brother, though, was beside
himself with grief, and there were honest fears

that he, too, might be driven to suicide.
He also claimed to any willing ears
that Guinevere's shameful deportment with her lover
was what his poor dear brother had killed himself over.

62 “So desperate was he that it seemed nothing to lose
the king's favor—if that was the cost to be paid—
for the sake of his revenge upon Guinevere, whose
behavior had killed his brother. He was not afraid—
for what worse could happen to him? Could the world abuse
him any further? The accusation he made
would either bring him justice or else would send
him to the block. Either way, his pain would end.

63 “Therefore, when the great hall was filled, he came
before the king and to him and the people said,
'Sire, it was your daughter's act of shame
that drove my poor brother out of his head,
so that death seemed good to him—and all the blame
is hers, the one he loved and would have wed,
but both his pride and love were so offended
by her behavior that his life is now ended.

64 “His love for her was honorable. In time
he hoped by service to you to further his suit,
but while he was hidden one night, he saw a man climb
up the forbidden tree to taste that fruit
he had hoped himself to gather. It was a crime,
for Guinevere came to the balcony, dissolute
and eager. And to help him ascend, she had
a ladder. I can't imagine a thing so bad.'

65 “And as if this were not shocking enough, he then
offers to prove every word in combat. The king
of course is sorely distressed that among the men
and women of court, anybody should bring

such charges against his dear daughter. But when he considers further, it only gets worse. The thing is that unless some champion come to defend her and prove Lurcanio's lying, he must send her

- 66 “to be beheaded. Of our law you may not have known, but it condemns any woman living here who has given herself to any man but her own husband to death—unless some knight appear ready to defend her honor in lone combat within a month. And for Guinevere that month has nearly run out. Soon she has got to submit herself to the headsman, guilty or not.
- 67 “The king is convinced she is innocent, and to free his daughter he has proclaimed that he'll give her hand to any knight who can challenge this calumny—and not just her hand but a dower of money and land. So far, no one has come forward for, if I may be candid, Lurcanio's famous for fighting and nobody wants to risk losing his life even to gain all that wealth and a beautiful wife.
- 68 “Every warrior seems to fear him who could remove this terrible stain on her reputation. She does have a brother Zerbino, and surely he would, but for many months he has been on a peregrination somewhere outside the country from which good reports have come. But to the king's frustration, nobody knows where he is now precisely. Otherwise he would come and do quite nicely.
- 69 “Zerbino's absence, however, does not mean that the king is doing nothing at all, for he is convinced that his daughter never did these obscene things. By rational methods he wants to see

if the accusation has substance, and he has been
arresting chambermaids in his inquiry.
I thought it prudent to be elsewhere, and suggested
to the duke that there would be danger if I were arrested,

70 “not only to me but to him as well. He approved
of my sensible warning and said I should not fear.
He thought it would be safer if I were moved
to a fortress of his, not very far from here,
where he could protect me better, and it behooved
me to go with those men, close and sincere
friends of his, to whom he entrusted me,
with what result, sir, you have been able to see.

71 “It is most painful for me to have to recount
those things I did for Polinesso, from
love, or at least infatuation. I won’t
try to excuse myself for having been dumb.
I did not expect to be rewarded. I don’t
on the other hand believe that what I have come
to is fair or just. It isn’t right
for a lady to be treated thus by a knight.

72 “He turns out to be ungrateful, treacherous, cruel,
and at the end, he doubts me, after what
I’ve done for him. I was an absolute fool,
and trusted that he was only trying to shut
me away from danger but, insouciant, cool,
he had other and worse intentions—to put
me at the mercy of those bloodthirsty men
who were at the point of murdering me when

73 “you appeared, for, dead, I’d be no threat
to him and could not bring the royal wrath
that he deserves down on his head. The debt
he owes me would be discharged in the aftermath.

This is how Love treats women! See what we get when we place our delicate feet on the dangerous path of dalliance.” Thus Dalinda told her tale to Rinaldo as they continued on the trail.

74 What a chance, Rinaldo thought, for a knight to do some good. Guinevere, he was sure was innocent. The opportunity to fight and show the world that she was chaste and pure was all the more delicious—though he’d have been quite prepared to enter the lists to defend a whore if that’s what she was. But her innocence was a real attraction and it did increase his zeal.

75 They hurried onward therefore to the town of St. Andrews, Scotland’s capital city, where there was by proclamation of the crown, to be that trial by combat that would declare Guinevere guilty or innocent. With a frown of determination, Rinaldo hurried there as fast as he could go—no time to lose! But they met a squire who had fresher news:

76 that a strange knight had appeared to undertake Guinevere’s defense, and nobody knew his name or where he was from. It was opaque. His armor had crests and devices, it was true, but no one recognized them or could make out what they might possibly mean. He kept to himself, was very secretive, and he never uncovered his face. He was obviously clever.

77 Even his own squire who waited on him declared that he had no idea who the knight might be, and he swore a solemn oath upon the gospels. And this detail, as anyone might

expect, only piqued their interest. Everyone made guesses about who it was who'd come to fight for Guinevere—or against Lurcanio—but at the trial, or after it, all would know.

78 Soon they approached the city walls and the gate where Dalinda expressed her fears about going inside. Rinaldo, of course, was most considerate, and reassured her until she was satisfied. The gate was closed, and during their brief wait for it to be opened, Rinaldo, mystified, asked why no inhabitants could be seen. The streets were entirely empty. What did this mean?

79 Opening up, the gate keeper explains that all the people have gone outside to watch on the opposite end of the town, where on the plains there is to be a trial by combat—a match between Lurcanio and someone who maintains the innocence of the defendant in the Scotch fashion. But who he is nobody knows (or, if they know, they're unwilling to disclose).

80 They may, he says, already have started, and he opens the gate to the Lord of Montalban. Then he locks it again. Through the city, the three make their way but they stop at a small inn where Rinaldo leaves the girl, where she can be safe until he returns. (He has no idea when.) He and the squire hurry then to the field of battle where, with lance and sword and shield

81 Lurcanio was set upon indicting Guinevere, while the other one, the unknown knight, was determined to defend her, fighting to the death if need be, in arms that shone

bright in the sunshine. Six more knights, reciting the charges, stood by. Lurcanio alone was mounted—on an excellent steed—prepared to maintain by his valor what he had declared.

82 Rinaldo on Bayard makes his way through the crowd, and the people, impressed of course, make way as quickly as they can to this paragon who is the flower of knighthood, the perfect chevalier. He approaches the king, salutes, and then speaks to the monarch and the people who hear him say, “Mighty lord, stop this fight at once; it can only result in the death of an innocent man.

83 “One of them believes what he says, but is in error, having been cruelly tricked. He declares what he sincerely believes to be true but his information is wrong, and in this he shares his brother’s error—that at the precipice drove him to take his life all unawares of what had really happened. It is a pity, but there is no blemish on you, or your daughter or city.

84 “The other one, so far as I can tell, has no idea whether the side he is on is right or wrong, but he comes here to do well through courtesy and goodness, taking upon himself the cause of beauty. But I can dispel the cloud with a few words and it will be gone, if only, in God’s name, you arrange a pause for the two knights who are met here in this cause.”

85 The king is moved by the noble and dignified bearing of the man—and is happy, too, that Guinevere may be innocent and his pride (and she) may survive unscathed, if this is true.

He interrupts the combat of course, to preside
at a different kind of trial. And Rinaldo who
is still on his horse makes plain Polinesso's trick
on Ariodante, and, making his argument stick,

- 86 offers, himself, to prove his claim on the field.
Polinesso is called forward and, ill at ease,
he attempts to deny what has just been revealed.
Rinaldo gives him the lie in his throat, and these
two go out to prepare themselves and wield
weapons at one another. On the breeze
the trumpets sound their clarion call, and again,
to signal the start of the contest between the men.
- 87 The king, the court, and the people are all behind
Rinaldo and hoping that he may vindicate
Guinivere, clearing doubt from any mind
that she is innocent and to calumniate
against her was a sin. (And also unkind.)
They hold their collective breath and anticipate
that Polinesso's denial is not worth tuppence,
and that he is about to get his deserved come-uppance.
- 88 Polinesso's face was pale, and his heart
beat in his chest as the trumpets' clarion blast
signaled to the knights that they could start.
They rode at each other, going very fast.
Rinaldo's aim was to take the fellow apart
which he pretty much did, for as the two knights passed,
he skewered Polinesso with his lance,
like a shish-ka-bob. (You've had one of these, perchance?)
- 89 He's on the ground, at least six arm-lengths away
from his horse, and Rinaldo dismounts and then progresses
toward him, removing his helmet. He hears the duke say
that it's over. He pleads for mercy and he confesses

in the king's hearing what he did—betray
king, country, and Guinevere. This mess is
what has brought him low and cost him now
his life, which he had hated anyhow.

- 90 And then the Q-sign, tongue hanging out: he's dead.
The king is grinning, relieved, and filled with delight
that his daughter is cleared by what Polinesso said.
He congratulates himself at how the fight
came out, and turns to Rinaldo, who's merited
some recognition and credit. This good knight
has done well, thanks be to God for having sent
a strong and virtuous fellow—magnificent.
- 91 The hubbub after a little time, dies down,
and as a kind of rational calm is restored,
there is another question remaining upon
which the king—and the people—would like some word
of clarification. Who was the other one
who first appeared to challenge the late lord,
the Duke of Albany? Who was this mystery man?
The king inquired, "Tell us your name, if you can."
- 92 After repeated and ever more pressing demands
from the king and everyone else the knight, in the end,
removed his helmet too, and from the stands
come gasps of amazement. And who do you think, my friend,
it could have been? But I am thirsty. My hands
are covered in ink. Let us, therefore suspend
this narrative for a bit. If your interest to
hear more holds, we'll find out in Canto Sesto.

Canto Sesto

- 1 He who tries to work mischief in secret believes that what is hidden will stay hidden, but, no, even though men may keep silent, yet the earth heaves to bring forth the truth, or the air itself will blow the news to the world's four corners of what he conceives and does and, afterwards, thinks that he can go merrily on his way. But on some small detail he makes a mistake, and then one and all
- 2 can see as God reveals his sin. And this is what Polinesso had come to, having supposed that with Dalinda now disposed of, his way was clear. But crime upon crime disclosed his malefactions. The entire edifice collapsed, when the furies, who seemed perhaps to have dozed, roused themselves to take from him honor, friends, and life itself. And thus his story ends.
- 3 But back to that cliff-hanger I'd created with that other knight of unknown identity, whom everyone on the scene had interrogated. He finally yields to force majeure and he pulls off his helmet. All those who had waited with bated breath discover him to be none other than Ariodante, mourned as if dead, but apparently alive and well, instead.
- 4 Guinevere is shocked but delighted. The king and Ariodante's brother, too, are relieved. The people are happy at this astonishing thing, for what that traveler told them, they had believed.

An unreliable narrator? Why would he bring such a report as to leave them all bereaved? He only said what he saw, and he spoke as if nobody could have survived a jump off that cliff,

- 5 head-first, no less. But it can happen that one in absolute despair at the top of some height thinks better on the way down of what he has done, and there in mid-air decides it isn't quite what he had in mind. And there was none to whom he could call for help. Therefore, the knight did what he had to do, which was to swim for his very life toward shore. And good for him!
- 6 He hauled himself out of the water and, dripping wet, made his way inland until he arrived at the hut of a convenient hermit. (You get such characters when you need them.) Having survived his plunge into the water, his mind was now set on finding out if Guinevere had thrived, happy with her new lover, or felt bad about what she'd done. Was she sometimes sad?
- 7 The first report that came back—for there was widespread talk all over the island—was that she had felt such grief for him that she'd nearly died. (Considering what he'd witnessed, how could this be?) He heard of his brother's demand that she be tried for fornication, and at this realized that he was furious at Lurcanio for doing such a thing to the woman he had been wooing.
- 8 This meant, he came to realize, that he still was in love with Guinevere, no matter what he thought she'd done. Lurcanio's good will he was quite ready to acknowledge, but

this was much too cruel, a bitter pill,
and hard to swallow. Sitting in that hut
he realized that Lurcanio's reputation
was such as to cause enormous trepidation

- 9 in almost any other knight who might
appear as Guinevere's champion, which meant
that Guinevere, for their prudence or their fright
might even be executed. Innocent
or guilty as she might be, this was not quite
what Ariodante wanted. And to prevent
her being killed he would, himself, compete (O
merciful heaven!) and do it incognito.
- 10 He tried to puzzle it out, but the basic fact
was that he could not bear that she should die.
She was still his lady. He had to act,
even if she was guilty. He would defy
his brother who might have been right when he attacked
her. "But she is beautiful and I
love her still," he thought, "with a sweet and tender
love that prompts me to go there and defend her,
- 11 "even if I should die, which might not be
such a terrible outcome." And in this way
he brooded about what the rules of chivalry
required, his pride, and how he could display
his constant love. And he realized that she
would see that Polinesso on that day
of reckoning had not shown up to prove
his valor or his honor or his love.
- 12 On the other hand, it was very pleasant to brood
on what it would mean to her, who had treated him so
badly, to see him dead and covered with blood,
and for her sake, and she would have to know

what his love had been worth. It would also be good to die at the hand of his brother Lurcanio. Imagining he is avenging me, he'll be filled with shame to discover that I am the one he has killed.

- 13 Having decided this, he took a new suit of armor (does the hermit stock this?), a shield, and a horse he rather liked and thought would do. The shield had a yellow-green chevron on a field sable (which is black). He recruited, too, a squire, which wasn't easy and, thus concealed, he went expeditiously back to St. Andrews to try to clear Guinevere's name or else to die.
- 14 And how it came out, we already know. The king was delighted and, now that the Albany duchy had reverted to him, he thought it was just the thing to give as Guinevere's dowry, for he was glad to reward Ariodante for triumphing over Polinesso. What a splendid lad! Where in the whole kingdom could one find another willing to fight to the death with his own brother?
- 15 So it's happy endings all around except for one with whom the parties have yet to deal. There is Dalinda still who has prudently kept herself back at the inn. She is in real jeopardy for having so overstepped herself albeit unknowingly, and she'll come up in the conversation, sooner or later. Will the king forgive her now? Or will he hate her?
- 16 It is Rinaldo who speaks up for her and he asks for the king's mercy for her and gets her pardoned, more or less, whereupon she goes off to a Dacian nunnery, and let's

leave her among the nuns in piety,
repenting her sins before saints' statuettes.
But now we return to Ruggiero where
we left him on that horse, high up in the air.

17 He's riding the hippogryph, you remember, way
up in the sky, which is scary, believe you me.
His color is good, and he's brave, but let us say
he trembles a little, or more than a little, and he
has left Europe behind. Or rather *they*
for it's more the horse that decides what their course will be.
They've passed the Hercules' Gates, of going beyond
which even bravest seamen are not fond.

18 Oh, is he fast, this horse! There is nothing in nature
that has such speed on the ground or in the air.
Never mind any other living creature,
but think of lightning flashing at night and there
is perhaps something equally swift. But teach your
children never to travel anywhere
on such a beast. It offers exhilaration
but there are safer modes of transportation.

19 The flying horse had gone far in a straight
line, Ruggiero supposed, but then it began
to wheel and bank, descending at a rate
the rider found alarming, for one could scan
below and see just endless water. But wait!
There was an island down there. The worried man
breathed a sigh of relief, for he understood
if the choice was water or land, then land was good.

20 The island was like the one that Arethusa
lived on (it was Ortygia, I recall),
fleeing the river god. (You have to use a
book of myths to get these stories all

in order.) Let's say it was nice (and who's a critic of islands anyway?). The small island loomed much larger as they got lower, and the hippogryph flew gentlier and slower.

- 21 Groves of fragrant laurel, palm trees, fruit of all kinds, flowers set out nicely in beds. It is a perfect paradise to suit the discriminating traveler. Overhead, a canopy of leaves to constitute a shelter from the sun had overspread the winding paths where beauty never fails to please and there are songs of nightingales.
- 22 Among red roses and white lilies scamper rabbits that have no cause to fear for their lives, and fawns and deer the place appeared to pamper, who've never imagined arrows or hunting knives. An ideal spot, you'd say, for any camper. And here it is that the hippogryph arrives, and when it is low enough and is hovering, Ruggiero jumps down and lands on the grass, discovering
- 23 the pleasure of standing again on solid ground. He stretches a bit to unkink his muscles. He holds the reins tight, though, having already found that the horse has a will of its own. He sees a tree, a convenient myrtle he ties the tack around, for he does not want the hippogryph to flee. Only then can he enjoy the pleasant breeze from the citron trees that are everywhere present.
- 24 He puts down his shield, which is heavy, and he takes his helmet off. It's hot and heavy too. He looks out at the sparkling sea that makes a soft susurrus, and he turns around to view

the attractive mountain behind him. Then he slakes his thirst at a gentle stream there, taking a few sips and then splashing the nice cool water on his face and neck until the parched feeling is gone.

25 He has traveled thousands of miles, which is bad enough, but wearing full armor makes it even worse. That chain mail is good looking but very tough over the course of time while you traverse thousands of miles on a horse that flies like a chough high in the air. (It would make a bishop curse.) The armor is perfectly good in a fight or parade, but a traveling outfit? That's not why it was made.

26 He is relaxing thus, but the horse is not happy. Something is bothering him. He neighs and tugs at the myrtle, trying to move from that spot and the tree, as he pulls and butts it, shivers and sways, shedding its leaves upon the grassy plot. But the poor horse, having tried in many ways to free itself, can't get loose. Ruggiero hears it calling for help. But what could cause its fears?

27 Think of a log on a fire, and let it be hollow at its core, so that, inside, moisture of some kind is trapped there. We have been near burning fires where not quite dried logs like that, with moisture trying to free itself, have made strange noises, have even cried as if in pain or anger. And what the horse is frightened by is the talking tree, which of course

28 is odd. And then Ruggiero approaches to find what the trouble is, and he also hears this tree say clearly, "If you would be so kind, could you untie your animal, which is

shaking my trunk and bumping its behind
on me. I suffer this metamorphosis,
but my pains are penance enough without this beast
abusing me, and I'd rather that it ceased."

29 At once, Ruggiero unties the horse and says,
"Whoever you are, or whatever you are, I extend
my sincerest apologies." If he betrays
no puzzlement as to what this may portend,
surely he is curious as to the ways
of this strange island he's on. The horse, in the end,
he secures elsewhere. And again, he expresses regret
for his ignorance of the garden's etiquette.

30 "I certainly wouldn't have wanted to disturb
your lovely foliage or cause any pain
in such a spot, where a *déjeuner sur l'herbe*
could happen at any moment. (Does it rain
here ever?) But tell me something of this superb
place and who or what you are. Explain
your bark and trunk and leaves. What happened to
you, sir? And I pray God keep hail off you."

31 It's rare that a tree speaks, but even more
rare for it to get so polite a reply.
Ruggiero continued in this vein and swore
by his own lady-love to do or die
to earn the tree's forgiveness and strive for
its benefit. And did this satisfy?
From roots to crown, the myrtle shivered. Trees
behave in such a fashion when you please

32 them. It also sweated a little through
its bark as if it were on its way to a fire.
(This is another thing they sometimes do.)
"Your courtesy, which I very much admire,

compels me to reveal my story to you,
who I was, and how I came to these dire
straits, changed to a tree on this pleasant strand.
I'll explain it so that you will understand.

- 33 “My name was Astolfo. I was a paladin
of France. Orlando and Rinaldo were my
cousins. I was the son of Otto and in
my possession was all of England. I
was handsome, graceful, and easily able to win
the hearts of women. I was riding high,
but in the end my excellence in wooing
turned out to be the cause of my undoing.
- 34 “We were returning from a cave on some
Indian Ocean island where I had been
confined with Rinaldo and others. A dank and glum
place it was. The powerful paladin,
Orlando, the *chevalier de Blaye*, had come
to set us free, and we were traveling in
a westerly direction along the sand
where strong northerlies blow without ceasing, and
- 35 “the road we were taking led us along the shore
to the town of the powerful sorceress, Alcina.
We found her fishing with neither fishhooks nor
nets, but just standing there. I'd never seen a
thing like it. The dolphin and albacore,
the mullet and salmon were coming toward her in a
great swarm to fling themselves at her, all
bewitched somehow and answering her call.
- 36 “All kinds of fish, grouper, grampus, hake
and other varieties I can't name were leaping
out of the water eager to fry or bake
or broil for her. Thus, all of us were keeping

our distance—because, at such a sight, you take your time—but she invited us with a sweeping gesture and we approached not wanting to be lacking in courage or any civility.

- 37 “Offshore, as we walked toward her, we saw a whale, the largest ever beheld in all creation. Anybody seeing that thing would fail to guess what it could be. In our estimation, it was an island to which one could sail for a holiday picnic. To our great consternation, this misprision of ours was to have no small effect. It was a pity that we were incorrect.
- 38 “Meanwhile, there is Alcina, calling fish with her incantations. She and Morgan Le Fay are sisters, although which one is older I wish I could tell you. (They are twins, some people say.) She looked at me with a clearly lickerish gleam in her eye that ought to have warned me to stay alert. Her plan was to get me alone and pursue her appetites—for a sorceress, easy to do.
- 39 “She approached us with a smile and courteous greeting, and invited us all to stay with her for the night. She showed us all the fish that we’d be eating and pointed out the different kinds. Polite, affable, and friendly, she was defeating any apprehensions that anyone might have about her. It seemed like jolly fun, and all she wanted was to please everyone.
- 40 “Then, as if she had just thought of a new amusement for us, she spoke of a siren able to calm the sea with her voice. She could take us to see this phenomenon—something from a fable,

but, as she insisted, perfectly true.
It was across the inlet, not more than a cable
span away. 'Would anyone like to see?'
I'm sorry to say that I was the one to agree.

- 41 "Rinaldo signaled to me, shaking his head,
as did Dudone, the affable giant, but I
dismissed their warnings. I was high-spirited
and wanted to see this siren. Almost shy,
Alcina smiled and beckoned, and instead
of being prudent, I just followed and by
and by I was on that island that was not
an island but a whale Alcina had got
- 42 "trained or bewitched. It had been stationary,
but now it started off and was swimming through
the waves of the sea, and right away I was very
sorry, and, I admit, afraid, as you
can imagine. Rinaldo, though he'd been warier, he
jumped into the water and swam to do
whatever he could to help me, but a storm
blackened the sky and tried to do him harm.
- 43 "What happened to him I have no idea, but she
reassured me and said he'd be all right.
The waves nonetheless were churning in the sea
and the wind roared, and the sky was black as night.
The whale was not affected by this and he
didn't even bounce or sway. It was quite
different from Jonah's trip, for he, alas,
was inside, while I was up on top, first class.
- 44 "At length we reached this lovely island that she
usurped from one of her sisters, their father's heir,
and the only legitimate daughter, apparently.
Alcina and Morgana, although quite fair

to look at are both wicked as they can be,
and the products, I'm told, of incest, and they share
a hatred of the third one. They have attempted
to drive her from the island and have preempted

- 45 “more than a hundred towns, and have invaded
her holdings many times. She, who is called
Logistilla, has been in this conflict aided
by geography, having a large bald
mountain on one hand and on the other, as did
the Scots, a river keeping them safe, as if walled
off from England's threat. Nevertheless,
her sisters do what they can to cause her distress
- 46 “because they are vicious and she is a model of virtue,
chaste, and holy, the kind of woman who must
arouse their hatred and envy. Goodness can hurt you
when the people around you are wicked and unjust.
But where was I now? I was about to alert you
about this island's dangers, and what we discussed
was how it came about—as you can see—
that I was somehow turned into a tree.
- 47 “Alcina kept me here in sybaritic
luxury, and she, I must say, adored me.
And she is gorgeous, as any honest critic
would have to admit. Her ardent feelings toward me
produced in me a reciprocal catalytic
response, such that it seemed to me that she
epitomized all the good of every place
and time, in her perfection of form and face.
- 48 “France I forgot, and the war, and all the rest
of the world and every thought of mine was directed
at her. Her passion in turn for me as the best
of all men everywhere was unaffected

and absolutely honest. She confessed
that there had been other lovers, but now she rejected
all of them. We were the whole world. We
were everything. Her paradise was me.

49 “These are ancient wounds for which there is no
medicine, and they hurt still. Even the good
pains me now to remember it, although
it all appeared to be perfect then. I should
have been more cautious, but I thought our love would go
on forever. I never understood
what kind of fickle woman she was. That heart
she’d given she took back, and sweet turned tart.

50 “Nothing is more absurd than a lover who’s been
rejected and replaced as I was barely
two months after arriving. I was in
the position of a thousand others, unfairly
discarded and inconvenient. To my chagrin
I learned that Alcina’s lovers very rarely
last any longer, and when she’s done with us,
to prevent us from telling tales of her amorous

51 “proclivities, she changes us—one to a fir,
another to an olive, or as you see,
a myrtle. Or else, as the whim possesses her,
into a bubbling spring, or it may be
some kind of beast—whatever she may prefer
or think amusing at the moment. We
who thought we were all but in heaven now discover
what is involved once to have been her lover.

52 “And now, Sir, having arrived at this remote
island, you too will realize that some
lover of hers has become a sheep or goat
or rock to make way for you who will become

happy beyond all measure. But do not gloat,
for in your turn, you will be changed to a dumb
beast or natural object some bright morning.
Remember then that you received fair warning.”

53 As they talked further, Ruggiero learned
that Astolfo was the cousin of his dear
Bradamante, and that he had been turned
into the wretched tree that was growing here
was even more upsetting. Therefore he yearned
to help in any way. But it was clear
that other than offering comfort and solace he
could not do much to aid a myrtle tree.

54 You think it’s easy? No, it’s very hard
to say nice things to a tree—about how its bark
is worse than its bite? You can’t even send a card,
unless it has that recycled paper mark.
Ruggiero did what he could in that regard,
and then he asked for directions from the park
to Logistilla’s realm. Could someone go
without passing through Alcina’s holdings? No?

55 Oh yes there was, the myrtle tree replied,
a road, or rather say a path, that went
up to the right on the steep mountainside,
hard going, with lots of rocks—an impediment
that he can manage. But the pass is fortified
by a tribe of savage mountain men who prevent
people from escaping, inasmuch as
Alcina likes to keep them in her clutches.

56 Ruggiero thanked the myrtle for his advice
and warning, and spoke the friendliest of words
hoping that the weather might be nice
and that only the gentlest of singing birds

might nest in his branches. In parting, once or twice
he patted the crepy cinnamon bark that girds
such trees and took his leave. His flying steed
he'd hitched close by where it could rest and feed.

57 But what to do with the hippogryph? This is
a question few of us worry about. To ride
is risky. The beast might not take any of his
suggestions and could go off on its own from pride
or orneriness, ignoring its rider, and this
can be inconvenient. Walk along by its side?
It surely is the safer way, although
it does mean that your rate of progress is slow.

58 But that was what Ruggiero decided to do,
for this way he would have some control over where
they went. And after he and the beast had gone two
miles, he could see, rising up into the air,
Alcina's city, quite beautiful to view
with its many spires of gold (Is it real?) that glare
in the sunlight. Seeing it, one desires to visit,
but that is not very wise or prudent, is it?

59 Remembering the instructions of the tree,
Ruggiero decided to leave the road that goes
to the huge gates of the city walls, and he
would follow instead that path to the right that rose
up into the mountains where he might be
less at risk. But then he met up with those
mountain men whose job it is to deny
passage to anyone trying to get by.

60 A motley crew, or worse than that, with faces
of monkeys or other beasts, but from the neck down
they have bodies of men, deformed in many cases,
but recognizable. They gibber and dance around,

wearing animal skins secured with laces
of rawhide, and they utter a screeching sound
like that of a bagpipe or, say, fingernails
on a blackboard . . . Ah, but any comparison fails.

- 61 Some are mounted on horses but without bits;
others ride oxen or on an eagle or crane
dart or lumber or flitter about and it's
scary but also ridiculous and insane.
One blows a horn of actual horn, one hits
a kind of drum, and one has a length of chain,
while still others have shovels, mattocks, picks
or files or hooks, while some just have rocks or sticks.
- 62 It isn't so much an army as a troupe
of side-show freaks, or perhaps the inmates of some
asylum that gives day passes to any group
that asks for them. Ruggiero looks on dumb-
struck at these bizarre creatures that whoop
and keen and growl, even as they come
closer, half-menacing and half-
hilarious. He tries hard not to laugh.
- 63 Their captain had a swollen belly and fat
face, and he rode a tortoise that walked extremely
slowly, but still he needed help as he sat
on the creature, for he was drunk and made unseemly
belches as he swayed this way and that.
Assistants held him up and wiped the obscenely
profuse sweat that poured from his forehead and cheeks
while he hiccupped and issued orders to his freaks.
- 64 Now one whose feet and abdomen were those
of a human being but whose head and ears resembled
a dog's commenced to howl at Ruggiero, the gross
meaning being that he should go back. He trembled

with anger and gestured and signaled that if the knight chose to press forward these creatures who were assembled would do him harm beyond all possible measure, not only out of duty but also for pleasure.

65 Ruggiero is having none of this. He replies by extending the blade of his sword toward the other's face. "I shall not go back," he says, "no matter who tries to make me, as long as my hand has any trace of strength to fight. Whoever opposes me dies." He might have gone on longer but this base creature tried to strike him with a lance and would have hurt him, if he'd had the chance,

66 but the knight ran his sword point all the way through the other's paunch and it came out from the small of his back extending a span or even two. Not surprisingly then, a free-for-all began, and with sword and shield he fought the crew valiantly in a most uneven brawl, cleaving this one in twain, skewering that, and cleanly beheading two more in this combat.

67 But they come at him from every direction and he is so beset that he would have needed all of Brirarius' hundred arms in that shivaree of blood and mayhem. He had, you will recall, that shield that could have blinded the enemy horde if he'd uncovered it. A small detail, perhaps. Or did the knight eschew it as something unsportsmanlike and thus not do it?

68 He would have preferred to die there than to yield to such a nasty and subhuman bunch, and thus to be dishonored on the field of battle, but as he took a painful punch

in the knee from an ugly midget behind him and wheeled
to fight him off, there came, just at the crunch,
two maidens from that golden city gate
riding on unicorns and coming straight

69 toward him. Gorgeous girls in white gowns, and just
in the nick of time, on animals whiter than ermine.
Beauty and Grace, perhaps? Was that angel dust
that glittered in their hair, by which to determine
that they were heaven-sent? (This can be discussed
when there's more time.) But fighting off the vermin,
Ruggiero was delighted at their arrival
and also at the prospect of his survival.

70 As they approached, the mountain creatures gave
way—from fear? respect?—and the maidens rode
up to the knight whom they had come to save
and held out their delicate hands. His visage glowed
from exercise and gratitude. Though brave,
he had been outnumbered and he owed
his life to them. And so when they invited
him to go with them, he said he'd be delighted.

71 So back they go to that city he had tried
to avoid. It has a very elaborate gate
covered with precious jewels on every side
and supported by four columns—quite ornate.
Think of Ferrara's cathedral, which is the pride
of that city and one of the buildings that make it great.
But is this magnificence that meets the eye
true or false? We'll find out by and by.

72 What does he see inside? There are dancing girls
leaping and running around scantily dressed,
with wreaths of flowers plaited into their curls,
and Ruggiero is shocked (one might have guessed)

but not altogether oblivious. Their whirls
and dips and pirouettes flash thigh or breast,
and while he's not unhappy to be here
he keeps a straight face and tries hard not to leer.

- 73 Is it paradise? Or hell? Or is it the place
where Love was born? Everybody is dancing,
singing, or playing games. There is no trace
of snowy-headed Thought. Lascivious glancing
seems to be what they do here. In any case,
Abundance is everywhere on display, prancing
and scattering goodies from its cornucopia
in what could easily pass as a utopia.
- 74 Here it is always April with balmy breezes
scented with flowers and fountains splashing brightly.
Young men and women frolic and take their ease as
somebody sings and strums an instrument lightly,
complaining how his pretty sweetheart teases,
while admiring friends applaud his song politely.
One might suppose that all these girls and boys
are posed for a painting of old Arcadian joys.
- 75 On the heights of pine and laurel, beech and fir,
Amoretti flit about in play,
taking aim to shoot at him or her
their darts of love, although there's another way,
and some find that wide nets are what they prefer.
Down by the brook, one busies himself through the day
tempering arrowheads in the stream. Another
sharpens them on a stone to help his brother.
- 76 Oh, and the horses! They give him a splendid steed
with a coat of a golden color and trapped out
in gold and jewels. And there is a boy to lead
the hippogryph behind him as they go about

the town—for no one is sure that it will heed
a rider's instructions, and this way is no doubt
safer and surer. They travel in procession
and the animals make a wonderful impression.

77 And now those pretty maidens who had arrived
to save Ruggiero from the weirdos high
on the mountainside so that he had survived
ask him if he could in return supply
some help for them. "We know how you have strived
(or is it striven?) for virtue, which is why
we ask this favor of you that without fuss
you could, if you were so disposed, do us.

78 "As we travel out of town we shall come to a stream
that divides the plain in two parts, and on guard there
at the bridge is Erifilla, from some bad dream,
a cruel giantess who, if she does not scare
off those who'd cross with her blood-chilling scream,
rips them apart. She scratches like a bear
but has the teeth of a snake and a poison bite.
She is, in brief, a thoroughly hellish sight.

79 "Not only does she block the bridge's road
across the stream, but she goes rushing hither
and yon wrecking the gardens of our abode,
and causing everyone a deal of bother.
Of many of those nasty types who showed
you incivility, she is the mother
and leader, and like her they are avaricious,
nasty, brutish, swinish, and malicious."

80 Ruggiero answers promptly that he's prepared
to fight on their behalf one battle or
a hundred and that if anybody dared
annoy them, he was eager to fight for

their benefit, for all he ever cared
about was doing good for others—more
than heaps of gold and silver or territory,
or the hope of worldly fame or undying glory.

- 81 The women thanked him very sincerely and they
went to the bridge over the river where
that woman stood blocking the right of way
in armor of gold, with emeralds here and there,
and sapphires also, to dazzle and dismay
all travelers and caution them to beware.
What happened then? Ah, we will let that go
a moment until Canto Settimo.

Canto Settimo

- 1 He who wanders far from his own campanile
will encounter things that are different from what he knew
and took for granted, and if he should speak freely
of what he has seen, even though it is true
it will be as if he is talking in Swahili.
Who will believe or understand him? Those who
haven't beheld these things with their own eyes may
doubt my word. I'm sorry. What can I say?
- 2 But it isn't the ignorant throng for whom I write.
You in whom the light of reason shines
in your intelligent minds will respond in quite
a different fashion to these rhyming lines,
believing every word. Ruggiero's plight?
I think he was at the bridge and there were signs
that he and Erifilla were to contend
against one another. And now, how will it end?

- 3 Her armor, first, was set with gems of many colors—rubies, emeralds, chrysolite. She was mounted, not on a horse that any person might want, but a wolf on which she'd fight. Ruggiero took a second look at this when he approached and wondered if she had trained it to bite. And it wasn't a normal wolf but enormous in size, tall as an ox, and with gleaming yellow eyes.
- 4 She did not deign to use a bit that would have irritated his mouth and made it foam. For directing him, she used her knees and could communicate in that way. Her Nastiness wore over her armor a flowing cape and hood as bishops sometimes do (but theirs are more resplendent—hers was of a sandy color instead of scarlet, which made it rather duller).
- 5 She had on her crest and shield a poison toad perhaps to let strangers know her disposition. She had come down from the bridge to the edge of the road and the ladies pointed her out (but by intuition he could probably have guessed). Intending to goad him to rash action, she denied permission for him to take one step further, to which he shouted out his defiance reciprocally.
- 6 The giantess settles into the saddle and spurs the wolf into advancing, fixing her lance, and the very ground trembles, but what occurs is that Ruggiero, taking his best chance, catches her just under the helmet (hers has a large chinstrap) in a blow that does not glance but knocks her off her mount and onto the ground at least six arm-lengths backwards and in a swoond.

- 7 Ruggiero, drawing his sword from his scabbard, goes toward the woman to decapitate her, but before he can get to her those maidens call out to him and ask him to wait. “Let her defeat be enough. She is comatose. Put up your sword and be compassionate. Let us cross the bridge and continue on our way,” they implore the knight in unison.
- 8 Whatever they want. He gives his consent and they climb the road that ascends a hillside to level out at a spacious meadow scented with sage and thyme with a vista of a palace, beyond all doubt one of the fairest in the world, sublime with glittering marble walls and all about it, splashing fountains and handsome statuary. And is Ruggiero impressed by this? Yes, very.
- 9 From out of the main gate Alcina appears to greet Ruggiero and welcome him in state. The court has come out with her, and he hears their compliments and praises for his great accomplishments. When the soul of a good man nears the choirs of angels assembled at heaven’s gate, he cannot expect much more in the way of greeting. Thus was Alcina’s and Ruggiero’s meeting.
- 10 Beyond the impressive architecture he sees that the people too are beautiful, every one young and healthy, and pretty as you please. (Is it a trick? And if so, how is it done?) But even more beautiful than any of these courtiers and attendants, Alcina alone outshines them like the sun in the sky whose light is greater than all the stars we see at night.

- 11 Her figure is one that a master painter might want
to draw to suggest perfection in womanhood.
Her hair is blonde and hangs in nonchalant
curls. Her delicate complexion could
be likened to rosebuds or privet blossoms—that can't
begin to suggest its beauty. And ivory would
also be inadequate to show how
fair and smooth the skin is on her brow.
- 12 Her eyebrows are perfect arches and her eyes
black suns, for they are dark but also shine
in a sympathy that is generous and wise
in their slow-moving gaze that seems to refine
the very idea of love. A cupidon flies
and shoots his darts wherever she looks. The design
of her nose is such that Envy itself cannot
imagine how to better the one she's got.
- 13 Beneath it are her perfect cupid-bow
lips that she's lightly touched with cinnabar
so as to look inviting, or as though
they have just been kissed or else they are
ready for such a moment, sweet and slow.
Her teeth are fine white pearls of course, but far
more precious are the words that she pours forth
so that one might think that this is heaven on earth.
- 14 Her neck? Snow! Her cupcake breasts? Cream!
Argus with a hundred eyes would stare
at every part and all those eyes would gleam
in delight, but then they close, imagining there
are other places of which he can only dream,
for clearly she is perfect everywhere.
And when she moves, it is as if a cloud
were floating across the sky, indolent, proud,

15 and altogether queenly. Her arms are slender
but not at all scrawny, and her fingers are long.
She has no knotty veins that those of her gender
so much dislike. Her dainty feet are strong
but elegantly rounded to match the splendor
of the rest of her where nothing at all is wrong
and everything is absolute perfection
to the casual glance and then upon closer inspection.

16 She is, in her whole being, a kind of net
in which to catch the eyes and hearts of men,
whether she speaks, laughs, moves, in silhouette,
or in full-face, and Ruggiero, when
he sees her is in love. Does he forget
the myrtle's dire warning? No, but when
she smiles, he cannot imagine treachery,
whether from naiveté or lechery.

17 There must be other explanations. Perhaps
Astolfo was transformed into a tree
because he was ungrateful or for a lapse
in decency or kindness, so that he
deserved to be treated badly. Many chaps
will justify themselves to some degree
or even lie from rancor and resentment
to try to lessen their old flames' contentment.

18 But what of Ruggiero's other innamorata?
Does he give no thought to her? Alcina has
the power to cloud men's minds, and if he's got a
wound from some romance of his that was,
"That was then and this is now," is not a
phrase you've never heard before. What he does
is not his fault, remember. Sorceresses
can bewitch a decent man so that he transgresses.

- 19 In the banquet hall, there are theorbos, lutes,
harps, citterns, and other instruments
from which a soft sweet music comes that suits
the décor and the mood and soothes the sense
while singers come forward, volunteers and recruits,
to sing of love and argue in its defense.
But who is attacking? Love is everywhere
and the men are handsome and all the women fair.
- 20 Ninus at Nineveh never kept so grand
a table, nor did Cleopatra serve
Marc Antony with any finer viand
than what this woman, so full of charm and verve,
set forth for Ruggiero's pleasure and
delectation, from the first hors d'oeuvre
down to the last desert and even the savory
with everything perfectly cooked and very flavory.
- 21 After dinner, they play a naughty game
in which one whispers into the ear of a neighbor
to ask a secret about which there might be shame
in an open conversation. With little labor,
their passions are disclosed but with no blame
attaching to anyone, and the lustful babe or
eager guy can make an assignation
responding to the other's invitation.
- 22 The game is fun, but even such delight
comes to its conclusion when the guests
disperse to their various chambers for the night
led by pages bearing torches to nests
of lively bliss. And Ruggiero is quite
delirious with all that this suggests—
he has the largest room, the softest bed,
and a mirror is on the ceiling overhead.

- 23 He remembers all those cordials and wines and those dainty goodies he could not possibly name, and he touches the comfy bed, and sniffs the rose perfume that comes from the linens to inflame the passions—as if there were any need. His clothes he lets drop to the floor (one can hardly blame him at such a moment). He lies down, all ears for the sound of footsteps if the lady nears.
- 24 Is that she? No! Is that? At every slight creak or rustle, he thinks that it must be, and he lies there on the bed, trying to fight the impulse to get up and look, for he wants not to seem too eager. But the night drags on as it can, with time's elasticity being something of which we are all aware. Moments are months. And you can hear your hair
- 25 growing on your head. How long can it take for her to get from her room to this one? How many steps is it? Has there been some mistake? Was she merely teasing? Will she disavow all those signals, leaving him awake the whole night long, to flatter herself. Or now, are those the precious footsteps he's listening for that sound so faintly along the corridor?
- 26 Alcina, at her dressing table, choosing choice perfumes and unguents, knows to enjoy these moments of anticipation, using all her experience. To be a little coy is not only good for him but also amusing for her as she imagines her new boy, his energies, his appetites, his vigor, which, with art can be made even bigger.

- 27 Astolfo's eager successor sees her come in,
and it is as if he has sulfur in his veins
burning so that he wants to jump out of his skin.
He leaps from the bed, and now that nothing restrains
his ardor he gathers her into his arms to begin
their voyage of delights. Nothing remains
but for Alcina to take off all that pretty
lace and silk. To tear it would be a pity.
- 28 She has neither robe nor petticoat but merely
a filmy peignoir over a filmier gown
so that Ruggiero is able to see clearly
what he has only imagined. He can drown
in loveliness such as this (or very nearly).
He has long ago removed his own
garments, and, as ivy clings to a tree,
they cling to one another and try to be
- 29 a single being, straining to touch and taste
such spices and perfumes as do not grow
in India or Arabia's sandy waste.
Who but the two of them can tell of so
sweet an encounter? There, as they embraced,
neither of them could with certainty know
whose tongue was in whose mouth—so the critique
turns out to be moot. Not even they can speak.
- 30 Not that they would, of course. About such things
there should be some discretion. Secrets are
better if kept, and silence often brings
more benefits than boasting does, by far.
But everybody guessed, for rumor's wings
are mighty indeed, and no one wanted to mar
Alcina's excellent mood. They all deferred
to Ruggiero without her saying a word.

- 31 There are no rooms in pleasure's mansion they
do not explore, finding new delights.
They change their clothing two or three times a day
for banquets, festivals, jousts, plays, and the fights
of Greco-Roman wrestlers, or they play
in the bath, or bathe in the fountains by the lights
of twinkling stars. All the love poets they read,
but their instructions these two do not need.
- 32 They venture outside to hunt for timid hares
or with trained bird dogs they go after the pheasants
that break from the brush, or else they set out snares
for thrushes, or they fish, as do the peasants,
with hook and line or nets. They have no cares,
but live in a magic realm of eternal pleasure,
in strenuous pursuits that tire them for
bed where they can exert themselves once more.
- 33 But how can we keep on with this happy pair
when difficulties of all kinds beset
Charlemagne and Agramant everywhere?
And Bradamante, what of her who yet
weeps for her longed-for lover? Up in the air
he disappeared on a hippogryph, don't forget.
Of other characters we now must hear
whose lives are more than endless skittles and beer.
- 34 Of Bradamante I will speak before
any of the others. We have left
her hunting in the shady woods and sore
afflicted by her loss—indeed, bereft.
Where could Ruggiero possibly be? The poor
girl, through towns and cities, right and left,
asks all she meets if they have any clue
of where Ruggiero might have gotten to.

- 35 Even into the Saracen camps she goes
asking for information from tent to tent,
but without any result for no one knows
anything for certain or can present
even a helpful guess or rumor. Those
knights and foot soldiers do not resent
her inquiry. Besides, for her protection
she can put that ring in her mouth like a confection
- 36 and in a convenient instant disappear.
An astonishing thing to see (or not to see).
That ring allows her to travel without fear
anywhere she wants. He cannot be
dead, she thinks, for if he were, she'd hear
as indeed would all the world, for he
is a man of such renown that the very skies
would darken at the news of his demise.
- 37 Then she has a thought! She will return
to that cave where Merlin is buried and her grief
will move the marble to pity. There she may learn
how and where he is now. Her belief
in Merlin's powers is boundless. From that urn
the resonant voice in words succinct and brief
will tell her what to do and where to go.
She sets out for that cave and is not slow.
- 38 So back she goes to Ponthieu in northern France
where in the wild and hilly country was hidden
Merlin's tomb where, not at all by chance
Melissa was keeping track of where she had ridden,
what she was doing, and what other circumstance
might be affecting her life. Whatever she did in
her quest for Ruggiero Melissa knew
as well or even better than me and you.

- 39 She casts lots every day, knowing that this
is the woman who will be the ancestress
of a noble race, and her desire is
that no harm come to Bradamante. No less
is she concerned about Ruggiero—in bliss,
she knew, in India, enjoying the caress
of Alcina that has clouded that knight's mind.
This happens not infrequently we find.
- 40 Playing, dancing, feasting, drinking, these
are lovely and we sometimes wish we could live
not merely in comfort but sumptuary ease.
Can Ruggiero, circumstanced thus, give
thought to his lord or lady or, if you please,
even his honor? To be admonitive
is not our purpose here, but we are concerned
that despite the myrtle's warning, he hasn't learned.
- 41 For such a knight to waste his days and years
in sluggishness and inactivity
and then—as anyone paying attention fears—
wind up as a rock or brook, or bush, or tree,
without a body or, as it appears,
even a soul would be good cause for tears.
Or would that soul survive somehow? Our poem
can't tell if it's in the xylem or the phloem.
- 42 The noble sorceress who took much better
care of him than he did himself decided
to restore him to the world of the living. To get her
purposes achieved she was provided
with drastic cures of fire and steel to abet her
treatment of this wounded patient. Why did
she undertake such action? She was not blinded
as Atlas was, by excessive love. Her mind did

43 not work as his did. Atlas wanted more
that Ruggiero's life be long than that
he should have fame and honor, and therefore,
he had dispatched the knight to visit at
Alcina's island and caused her to adore
him absolutely and by his fiat
the cords that bound their hearts together never
could be frayed or even loosened. Clever?

44 But back to Melissa, who knew where to await
Bradamante on the road, and came to meet her.
Bradamante is pleased of course. Her great
and bitter pain changes to hope (which is sweeter).
Melissa tells the maiden of the fate
of Ruggiero—and candidly. To treat her
otherwise would be unkind. She hears
about Alcina's palace and bursts into tears.

45 Even worse than the jealousy is her fear
that when Alcina tires of him, as she may
any day now, the man will disappear
and in her horticultural display
take his place among the plantings. Here
Melissa has not been scrupulous, to say
the least, for in Atlas' plan Alcina will be
in love with him for all futurity.

46 What Melissa does reveal to her is the salve
best suited to soothe her agonizing pain,
which is that within a short time she will have
Ruggiero back and in her arms again.
“We have the ring,” she says, and with a suave
gesture concludes, “and with it we can obtain
a triumph over other magic. I can
go there with it and bring you back your man.”

- 47 She promises Bradamante that she will leave
at the first hour of evening. She will arrive
in India by dawn and will achieve
the rescue of Ruggiero from that hive
of honeyed indolence and make-believe.
As Bradamante's forlorn hopes revive
she gives the ring to the sorceress with pleasure,
and with it goes her heart—say for good measure.
- 48 “Help me,” she says, “but more to the point, help him.
And give him a thousand greetings that I send.
I am much in your debt.” Her dark eyes brim.
Then she turns toward Provence and starts to wend
her way, encouraged. The other, interim,
goes in another direction to apprehend
Ruggiero and bring him back to the world and to life
so that he can then take Bradamante to wife.
- 49 To go a long way in a short time,
the sorceress summons up from the depths of hell
an Alchino or a Farfarello. (I'm
assuming that you recognize them well
as names that Dante mentions in his *Divine
Commedia* of minor demons.) The spell
she casts is enough to metamorphose it to
a palfrey that can go like the devil. (Oooh!)
- 50 She mounts this beast, and let us get it right . . .
Her hair is all disheveled, and she is unshod.
No belt or girdle! She does look a sight!
She has taken the ring from her finger so that its odd
powers don't get in the way whenever she might
want to cast some spell of her own. With a nod
and wink she is on her way, and as day breaks
she's at Alcina's island, for goodness' sakes.

- 51 Her scheme is to change herself, becoming taller
by a palm's width and in proportion making
her limbs larger. She alters her face and all her
features to look like Atlas. It's breathtaking,
for she grows a beard as white as his and no smaller.
She ages her skin with little wrinkles snaking
all over her brows and cheeks in every place
where they appear on Atlas's aged face.
- 52 And then she hides, which is easy enough to do,
and waits for a chance to speak alone with the man.
But they always seem to be together, those two
lovers. She bides her time, as a sorceress can,
until Alcina disappears from view,
and Melissa at last can carry out her plan,
appearing before Ruggiero in the guise
of Atlas and deceiving his ears and eyes.
- 53 He's lolling near a gentle stream (Do knights
loll, for heaven's sake?) and dressed to the nines
in silk and cloth of gold that should, by rights,
appear on the bodies of decadent Byzantines.
Alcina wove it herself. All the delights
of the island are his. Among the celandines
and buttercups he watches the fish play
in the little pond they frolic in all day.
- 54 He's got a rope of gems at his neck that hangs
down to his chest. His wrists are decorated
with heavy bracelets of gold, and under his bangs
you can see ear rings you'd have anticipated
on rajahs (or their pet orangutans),
with huge baroque pearls—not understated
by any means. The get-up is so grand
that Melissa wonders if he's been unmanned.

- 55 His hair is slick with pomade and it reeks
of *eau de quelquechose*. (It's very floral.)
In all his actions and in the words he speaks,
he might be a minor player in some immoral
court as at Valencia, say, where freaks
of nature sing and dance in a free-for-all.
Everything about him is soft except
his name which, though enchanted, he has kept.
- 56 Looking and sounding like Atlas, the sorceress
confronts Ruggiero, and she is very stern
when she upbraids him for his idleness.
“Is this what my investment in you shall earn,
indolence, self-indulgence, and foolishness?
These are such things as I brought you up to spurn.
Did I nurse you on bears' and lions' marrow bones
for you to be one of Alcina's epigones?”
- 57 “You strangled vipers in your trundle bed,
de-clawed panthers and tigers, and you drew
the tusks from living boars. Thus were you bred
up to do deeds of valor. And look at you!
You were a knight, brave and high-spirited,
but now you're a joke and a great embarrassment to
anyone who ever knew you. What is
a shame is that you're Adonis, Alcina's Attis.
- 58 “Is this why I studied omen and sign,
cast horoscopes, and performed the sacred rites,
to profit by their answers that might combine
to make you one of the finest and bravest knights
the world has ever seen, one who'd define
chivalry in his noble deeds and fights,
so that men might sing your praises for generations
and your name would be revered in every nation's

- 59 “folklore? You were to be an Alexander,
another Julius Caesar or Scipio,
but I see you at your ease, willing to squander
every advantage you had, just let it go,
to wear those chains on your neck that are, in candor,
slavery’s bonds, or the badge of a gigolo,
or, better, a fancy collar by which you’re led
around like a lapdog and then are called to bed.
- 60 “You are about to answer me that it’s your
life to do with as you will, but that
is not the entire truth and is a poor
excuse for what you do here and for what
you are stealing from your many descendants who’re
waiting in the womb for the signal at
which they may emerge to lives of fame
unless you prevent them all, to your great shame.
- 61 “Think of those noblest souls that may be formed
when eternal ideas receive their bodies’ matter.
The roots of that tree are in you, and if you are harmed,
then the thousand triumphs that all those latter
descendants should earn in diplomat’s clothing or armed,
your self-absorption will nullify or shatter
like a glassblower’s bauble that cools too quickly on
the bench and flies apart—and its beauty is gone.
- 62 “Or let me make it even clearer for you.
Think of a single pair of brothers who will
be born: Hippolito and Alfonso, two
matching and matchless paths up the steep hill
of virtue the whole world will be thankful to.
For the sake of those two it behooves you ill
to languish here in this pleasant living death.
Are you listening? Or do I waste my breath?

- 63 “When you were growing up, I used to speak
about these two, and you perked up your ears
more interested in them and their unique
place in Italian history, but it appears
that even their resonant names that used to pique
your interest so cannot produce the tears
of shame I should have expected. It makes me sick.
But I have yet one more effective trick
- 64 “to play, and this, I believe, will work. Consider
Alcina, that extravagant whore, and all
those thousands of other men who also did her.
How did they end up, do you recall?
Happy? Grateful? Proud of themselves? Or bitter?
Put this ring on, for it will disenfranchise
you and allow you to see her true beauty.
Do this for me, and because it is your duty.”
- 65 Ruggiero doesn’t know what to say. The ring?
He lets the magician slip it on his finger.
Who’s going to notice this with the other bling-bling?
And what can it do? He doesn’t feel a thing. Or
does he? A wave of shame makes his cheeks sting
as he comes back to his senses. What else will it bring? Or
is this all? He looks at Atlas’ face,
but as he does, standing there in his place
- 66 suddenly it is Melissa, who explains
who she is and why she has come here.
She lets him know that he has been held in chains
of enchantment, which he need no longer fear.
She mentions Bradamante who remains
in love with him and sent this ring with sincere
wishes for his good fortune—with all her heart.
He’ll owe his life to her in no small part.

- 67 She explains why she disguised herself that way—
to look and sound like Atlas of Carena—
to get him to listen to what she had to say.
It was for his own good, lest he remain a
hopeless sybarite wasting every day
in foolishness when he should try to attain a
share at least of the glory for which he was reared.
To Melissa he might not have paid attention, she feared.
- 68 She explains the ring's powers and how it protects
its wearer against any other incantations
and not at all incidentally corrects
misprisions that may occur in confrontations
with sorcerers and magicians one expects
to pop up now and again in odd situations.
Bradamante sent it—and would have sent her heart
if it had healing powers to impart.
- 69 Then she describes how Bradamante is still
faithful, loving, and true, while he, on the other
hand, has been rather flightier—until
this moment, at any rate. But now that another
path has opened for him to take, he will
return to his proper life and no longer bother
with these contemptible distractions and
diversions that he has found in Alcina's land.
- 70 Whether because of Melissa's reasoned speech
or because the ring on his hand lifted the veil
that had clouded his vision, he felt his passion leach
away, which left him slightly giddy and pale.
Even without her before him, the ring could teach
that Alcina's beauty was all external, a frail
covering over the terrible evil in her
that he ought to have noticed in bed if not at dinner.

- 71 He remembers how as a boy he had a pear—
or a peach or maybe an apricot—he had laid
by for eating later on when there
was the right mood and occasion. But he delayed
too long and when he returned to the place where
he'd hidden it away, it was decayed,
squishy, horrid, nasty, and nothing that you
would want to touch. So, with Alcina, too,
- 72 for Melissa insisted that he go to see her now
with the ring on his finger to let him see the true
Alcina, no matter what she might allow
or try to prevent. And this he said he would do
to satisfy her, as he wanted to do anyhow:
he has his pride and his curiosity, too.
How different could she be? And could he tell
with the ring that protected him against any spell?
- 73 How indeed! Her face is wrinkled and old,
her hair is wispy and white and falling out
as are the teeth in her mouth (or if one told
the truth, the tooth, for the rest are gone). She's about
four feet perhaps. She is a hundred-fold
as ancient as the Sibyl was, no doubt,
or Hecuba. And he was in love with this,
and eager for her smile and for her kiss?
- 74 She is a triumph of artifice over truth,
deceiving many as he has been deceived,
and blinding them so they see beauty and youth
where there is neither and making them believe
her cruel fiction. But with the ring (forsooth!)
Ruggiero is repulsed—as well as reprieved.
He cannot imagine loving what he has seen, a
caricature but the actual Alcina.

- 75 But following Melissa's good advice
he does not let on that he can now see her clearly,
and he speaks and behaves as he always has, is nice,
attentive, and even affectionate. (He nearly
bursts into horse laughter once or twice,
but he controls himself and seems as sincerely
interested as ever.) One day he tries
his armor on—he wants to check its size.
- 76 He even takes Balisarda (that's the name
of his sword) and the magic shield with its cover, too.
It would seem to anyone that he played some game,
walking around that way, but people do
peculiar things sometimes. It was all the same
to them if he wanted thus to remember who
and what he used to be. They could understand,
and they all agreed that he looked very grand.
- 77 He saunters off toward the stables (wouldn't you know?)
and saddles and bridles a war-horse as black as pitch
called Rabican, who is well built and can go
as fast as the wind. He is the horse on which
Astolfo himself was mounted—it was not so
long ago—on the whale that had been bewitched
to appear to be an island. He chooses this
rather than the hippogryph which is,
- 78 as Melissa has reminded him, hard to control.
She promises that she will bring it along
and train it so it is gentle as any foal.
But to ride it now would be dangerous and wrong.
He understands that she's right, and that the whole
idea is to escape. He's not headstrong.
But ask yourself how unhappy you'd be if
you hadn't learned to control your hippogryph.

- 79 Another reason to leave him though is not
to arouse suspicion. They'll all assume he is gone
riding just for exercise, as a lot
of people do. At length he settles upon
Rabican, and, carrying out their plot,
leaves the castle he has now learned to shun
and approaches the main gate beyond which there
is freedom and a healthy change of air.
- 80 There are guards, but he attacks them sword in hand,
surprising them and leaving some of them dead
and others gravely wounded—all as planned.
And then over the bridge and on ahead
to Logistilla . . . And, and, and, and, and.
Alcina has no idea that he has fled,
but we do, and we're glad, and we cry, "Bravo!"
as we look forward now to Canto Ottavo.

Canto Ottavo

- 1 Are there not among us every day
enchanters and enchantresses whom we
do not recognize because of the way
they can deceive us not by wizardry
but merely with the lies and frauds that they
perpetrate upon us continually?
By means of their sophisticated arts
they forge the chains that bind our innocent hearts.
- 2 Angelica's ring is handy, but lacking that,
what we can use is reason that helps us see
the true faces of men and women and what
they are behind their pretenses by which we

would otherwise be fooled. When we look at one who seems good, reason may show him to be wicked and foul. It was, then, a lucky thing for Ruggiero that he had that magic ring.

- 3 The last we saw of him, he had stormed the gate from the inside heading outward, where of course the guards were unprepared for such a great onslaught of a valiant knight on a horse like Rabican, and it was their sad fate to be pierced, cloven, slashed, or even worse. He crosses the bridge and immediately breaks through the portcullis, which is very tough to do.
- 4 So he's on the road and away at last, but he meets one of Alcina's servants on whose arm there is a hunting falcon that now and then beats its wings. He's riding an unimpressive farm horse and has a dog with him. He greets Ruggiero but is rather less than warm, for the falconer has some suspicion that he, riding as fast as he can, may be trying to flee.
- 5 "Why in such haste?" the servant asks, but the knight makes no reply, which confirms the former's guess, so that he asks, "What if my bird takes flight as it would do if I released the jess and then allowed this bird of mine, which is quite fierce, to attack? You'd be defenseless, yes?" And that's what he does, and the bird flaps its wings and flies at Ruggiero and tries to peck out his eyes.
- 6 The churl jumps down from his horse and he removes its bit and it becomes a weapon—the shaft of an arrow fired toward Ruggiero, its hooves kicking and teeth biting as if some daft

demon were goading it. And it disimproves
from there as the huntsman by means of some witchcraft
sics the dog on him to bite and harass
the mounted knight, to hurt, annoy, and embarrass.

- 7 What is this? A snapping dog? A kicking, biting
horse? The huntsman seems to be unarmed
except for a wand he carries. Is this fighting
or parlor tricks? Ruggiero is not alarmed,
but the teeth are sharp and they deserve requiting
one way or another, or he could be harmed.
Draw his sword, then? Would that be sporting or
is this what the situation is asking for?
- 8 The hunter comes up and gives him a hard punch
on the right leg, while the dog on the other side
is snapping at his foot as if it were lunch.
And the damned bird, meanwhile, above, beside,
before and behind, is slashing: its talons scrunch
on Ruggiero's armor, and Rabican's hide
is bloodied. This is irksome and it's wrong,
and cannot be allowed to go on for long.
- 9 Okay, okay. He draws his sword at last,
and slashes, thrusts, and parries as best he can,
but the dog is dogged and the bad bird is fast,
and however he wields his sword, he misses the man.
He'd try to make a run for it and get past
these nuisances but, skittish, Rabican
doesn't respond any longer to the reins,
and Ruggiero has to wonder what obtains?
- 10 To make it even worse, he hears the sound
of trumpet and kettle-drum and it's coming closer.
Alcina's people are roused and covering ground
as they chase him at an impressive speed. Ah, no, sir,

no thanks, he'd much prefer not to be found
in this condition, engaged in an otiose or,
worse, a humiliating confrontation,
which requires, he decides, prompt termination.

11 It is disgraceful to fight with a sword against
a dog, a bird, and an unarmed man, but he
has to dispatch them quickly—so he commenced
to think for a change, and he took the shield that we
have been waiting for him to use and are incensed
that he hasn't yet. He removes the cloth, and, see,
the hunter falls down on the ground, with the dog, and the bird,
bereft of their senses, wonderful and absurd.

12 Ruggiero is perfectly happy to leave them there,
and off at once toward Logistilla he goes.
Alcina, meanwhile, has heard the news. In despair
she beats her breast, does violence to her clothes,
calls herself a fool, weeps, pulls her hair,
and does all the conventional things that those
in great distress are often seen doing. She
performs all these behaviors punctiliously.

13 But she makes a plan. One group should go by land
to chase him down. Another will come by boat
with her in the vessel that she keeps on hand
and they set sail. She fails, though, to take note
of how the castle now is left unmanned
and vulnerable, so much does she devote
her mind to bringing her lost lover back.
It is a flaw in her plan of attack

14 that gives Melissa just the chance she needs
to free those wretched people who have been
transformed by spells—and she of course succeeds,
untying knots, unsealing seals, and in

some cases burning images. She speeds
about reversing the magic. (Put the djinn
back in the bottle somehow?) She recovers
the human forms of all of those ex-lovers.

- 15 Fountains, animals, trees, rocks, or whatever
shape the whim of the sorceress has devised
she changes back to the human in a clever
peripeteia. The lovers are surprised
for in their garden spots they had thought never
to be so rescued. When they are apprised
of Ruggiero's journey to Logistilla
they all make haste together toward her villa.
- 16 From there they are discharged to travel on
to Scythia, Persia, Greece, or the Indian shore.
Melissa helps them hurry thither and yon.
Astolfo, the English duke who is no more
a myrtle tree and, you remember, is one
of Rinaldo's cousins is most grateful for
his restoration. Melissa, though, is not
satisfied at all until she has got
- 17 the golden lance! (It was Argalia's once
and then belonged to Astolfo.) It cannot miss
but ousts from the saddle all whom it confronts
at the first pass, and obviously this
is useful in a weapon. Melissa hunts
all over for it, certain that it is
somewhere in the palace, with his armor, too.
And she finds it at last (as we were sure she'd do).
- 18 She has the lance, the armor, and the ring
(Ruggiero has given it back to her already).
And now she gets the hippogryph to wing
its way to Logistilla's, high but steady,

with Astolfo on the croup—a giddy thing,
but he holds on tight and does not show the dread he
must be feeling. These two arrive around
an hour before Ruggiero, who's going by ground.

- 19 And it's tough going, too. Rocks and more rocks.
Bare desolate country without a sign
of life. Now and then an enormous boulder blocks
his passage and he has to go around it. Fine,
he does that, and then, with the patience of an ox
plods onward while the sun beats down in malign
intensity. He thinks his brain may fry,
but then he comes to a beach, and up in the sky
- 20 the sun seems to have thought to poach it instead.
The water glistens daggers, the sand is about
to melt and turn into glass. The birds are dead
or sleeping. The silence is such that he wants to shout
to make sure his ears are working. In his head
a steady chirr of cicadas raises the doubt
that he has tinnitus. Leafless, lifeless, bad.
Ruggiero wonders if he is going mad.
- 21 It isn't good for him, and for us, it's a bore.
Of heat, thirst, and fatigue, what can one say?
Let us therefore leave him on that shore,
wishing him well, but turning our eyes away
to something altogether different for
the sake of the poem. We'll go back to Scotland, say,
where Rinaldo—remember Rinaldo?—has been busy,
and ought to be doing well for himself. But is he?
- 22 The king holds him in the highest esteem, as does
Guinevere, his daughter, and all the land.
He has the leisure now to explain the cause
of his arrival here, which we understand.

He is asking for whatever help that Scotland has available, and England, too, for the Grand Charles—or Charlemagne, as he is known in the Empire where he sits upon the throne.

- 23 The king was not only agreeable but eager to help in any way within his power. He had always intended to do whatever his meager resources could provide, and at this hour knights were already gathering in league (or however they like to do this), the finest flower of Scotland. He would lead them himself had he not grown so old and as weak, as one can see
- 24 at a glance. But he has a son, he says, who is strong and smart, and better fit to command these men. He is not now in the country, but will ere long arrive when the forces have gathered together, and then they shall set forth to right whatever wrong Charlemagne is defending against. Amen. His bailiffs, even now, his majesty says, are recruiting in Scotland's bonnie banks and braes.
- 25 If this is what the king says, it happens of course, and there is a call for horses and brave knights throughout the highlands and the lowland gorse to come and assert the Emperor Charlemagne's rights. Rinaldo, wholly intent on raising a force bids farewell to Scotland and its delights and heads toward England. The king goes with him as far as Berwick, but there they say goodbye and are
- 26 extremely sad to do so. Rinaldo boards a ship. The master casts off, raises sails and with a fair wind heads south to have words with rulers who'd hope Christianity prevails.

They enter the Thames and row upriver towards
London with letters he has for the Prince of Wales
from Charlemagne and his father King Otho, too,
besieged together in Paris. (*Sacre bleu!*)

27 In the place of Otho, the Prince of Wales, who remained
in London, gave to Rinaldo, Amon's son,
a royal welcome. The latter then explained
the reason for his visit, and, when he'd done,
the prince granted his wishes, unconstrained,
eager to help, and hoping the war would be won
decisively. He fixed upon a day
when Britain's forces would set out for Calais.

28 Until then, fun and banquets, but one might
assume all that. For orchestration requires
that after many sackbut riffs, some slight
change is welcome, say to harps and lyres.
I've been speaking—it must seem all night—
of Rinaldo's doings, but one perhaps desires
news of the fair Angelica. (She had sped
from him and had met a hermit as she fled.)

29 She detests Rinaldo, you will recall,
and wants not to be on the same continent as
he is. Therefore she is trying by all
possible means to reach a shore that has
boats that can take one elsewhere, large or small,
fast or slow. Any will do, because
she doesn't much care where they are going to.
Getting away is what she wants to do.

30 As good musicians do, who modulate
their keys and modes, let us follow her story,
changing the subject so that I may narrate
how she gets on with this elderly and hoary

hermit whose bones feel warmed, even at this late stage in life, by beauty like hers. Before he knows it he feels a resurgence of heat that teases his hunger, his lust, and his thirst in a synesthesia.

- 31 Angelica takes no notice of him whatever, and it's difficult for him, on a donkey, to maintain his speed. She's moving ahead, and in his endeavor not to lose sight of her, he begins to rain blows on his stupid beast, but it seems never to take any notice of this, and will not deign to hurry. Perverse, lazy, the animal has those qualities you associate with an ass.
- 32 On the road she's so far ahead of him that he can hardly see her anymore, and what can he do but resort to magic and wizardry? He summons up a pack of demons but only needs one to accomplish the knavery he has in mind—to enter into the gut of the steed Angelica's riding to control its mind and actions. (Does it have a soul?)
- 33 The chase is easier now, for he's like a hound that has been out after foxes and rabbits before and knows where they're likely to be when they go to ground and where they'll come out—which is always at death's door, where he's already waiting for them, ready to bound upon them and cover the green grass with their gore. Now, wherever she goes, he'll be there waiting with a smug smile on his face, anticipating . . .
- 34 Anticipating what? Do I have to spell it out? You want the sordid details? Wait until we cannot avoid it further. I'll tell it clearly enough. Angelica's horse's gait

is a brisk canter, but inside the horse (oh, well, it can't hurt to remind you!) the reprobate hermit's demon is hiding, ready to strike and guide the horse to wherever the hermit would like.

- 35 She's going along the beach of the Atlantic on the Gascon shore where the wet sand is packed firm, but the horse, seized by the demon, is frantic and heads into the water. She cannot distract or deter him in any way from this weird and antic desire to be a sea-horse and swim. In fact, all she can do is hold on tight to keep from falling off to be swept into the deep.
- 36 She pulls on the reins, she talks to him, but he keeps swimming out to sea. In a raffiné gesture she hikes up her skirts a bit so that she can keep them dry. Her hair is in disarray. The winds and waves are aroused by this, and the sea churns all the more, excited by such a display. (Do I exaggerate? And do you care? But you'll have to trust me, because you weren't there.)
- 37 Aside from the spray of the sea there are also tears that sprinkle her breast. The shore is farther away moment to moment, and the poor maiden fears drowning—or is there some way to save the day, turning the horse slightly so that it veers to the left (or to port) in a circle, in order that they may arrive back on shore? It seems to be working, or was this what the horse was anyway aiming for?
- 38 Either way, that's how it all turns out, and she reaches the beach of a bleak and rocky cove with caverns—the whole grim landscape, I have no doubt, you can imagine. The darkening sky above

only makes it all the grimmer. She looks about and is frankly terrified. Is this what she strove so hard to reach? She's on dry ground, but you can come to a sudden and violent end there, too.

- 39 Either from where she is now or what she just went through, the poor girl seems to be in shock. She does not or cannot move. Her hair is mussed. From a distance one might mistake her for a rock, but her eyes are raised as if to ask the august power of fate what she has done to provoke such unremitting enmity—or the wish to watch as her sodden corpse is nibbled by fish.
- 40 She speaks, addressing the heavens: “Fortune, what more can you do to me? And why have you such ill will? What can I give as an offering but my poor life, which you all but took just now, but still have let me retain? And I wonder whether it’s for further exquisite torments before you kill me in some catastrophe of your choosing that you believe may be even more amusing.
- 41 “On the other hand, what worse can you do to me than you have already done? I was driven away from my royal city that I cannot hope to see ever again. And I hear what the people say—that I have lost my honor, my chastity. It isn’t true, but they think so anyway. Because I have been a wanderer on the earth, I am an object of ribaldry and mirth.
- 42 “Take away a woman’s reputation, and what has she got? What is she worth? My looks that should be a credit to me are an accusation, the occasion of unjustified rebukes

if not direct then by insinuation.
They are a liability in the books
of any honest appraiser. Had I been plain,
my dear brother Argalia might not have been slain.

- 43 “Because of how I look, King Agrican
of Tartary defeated my poor father,
Galafron of Cathay, the mighty khan.
My beauty has been a burden and a bother,
and I am forever moving, a caravan
of one, with no oasis to rest and gather
my thoughts together. What can you do to prolong
my punishment for having done no wrong?”
- 44 “You could have drowned me in that turbulent sea,
but you saved me, if only so that I could be mauled
by some ravenous beast that you have reserved for me.
When at last my mangled corpse is sprawled
on these black rocks, I shall at least be free
from further hurt and will thank you.” Thus she called
into the empty night when the hermit made
his entrance, or let us say his ambushade.
- 45 From a high rock, he had been looking down
having arrived here just six days before
Angelica, whom he watched very nearly drown,
and then in desperation reach the shore.
Now he can seem to come to her aid with a frown
of concern and piety, such that she’d take him for
another Paul or Hilarion. (Those two
were early hermits, or should I assume that you knew?)
- 46 When she first saw him, she was comforted
and reassured, for she had no idea
what kind of man he was. His habit led
her to believe him good, for how can there be a

wicked hermit? Trusting him, she said,
“Pity me, O father, for you see a
poor girl in a very sorry state,”
and as clearly as she could, she tried to relate

- 47 her story that he knew already and had
in part himself contrived. He puts his arm
around her shoulder to comfort the poor sad
creature . . . or does he mean her any harm?
He touches her face, her breast. He’s very bad!
His tries to embrace her, and in her alarm
she pushes him away. She avoids his kiss
but wonders, as she well might, what is this?
- 48 She’s furious! This is grotesque. It can’t be real!
Would a hermit, or somebody dressed as one, molest
a girl this way and try to cop a feel?
But the hermit is prepared (as you may have guessed)
and he takes from a little pouch his robes conceal
some duppy-dust he carries—second-best
to their cooperation, but it’s fool-proof—
and sprinkles it on her with a little poof.
- 49 She sinks into a swoon and then he can
take liberties, touching, caressing, and feeling her up.
He has her at last in his power, and this bad man
can proceed how and where he wishes. Ah, but his grope
exceeds his reach, or to put it more plainly than
propriety might approve, he is limp as a rope.
His aged body betrays him now as if it
were somehow in cahoots with this sleeping twit.
- 50 This dog won’t hunt. This horse won’t jump. You get
the general drift. However, he keeps on trying,
but the fire won’t burn, the kindling is wet,
and the faint glow of the ember is weak and dying.

He has no other choice then but to let
it go and take a nap on the ground there, lying
next to her—for whom Dame Fortune has more
woes and tribulations yet in store.

51 But before I carry on with this narration
and tell how Angelica fared, let us once more
indulge ourselves with a little divagation
and turn our attention to Ireland's rough shore
where those brave souls who've done some exploration
report that there is an island where the poor
inhabitants have been ravaged by the very
dreadful orc, a day's sail west of Kerry.

52 This is Ebuda, which sea-monsters assault,
having been sent by Proteus in his rage
at what happened long ago. (It isn't the fault
of those who live there now, but on the page
of history books it is written that by the salt
sea, a fair princess of a tender age
would sometimes wander and the sea god's heart
was set afire—or was it some other part?)

53 You know what these gods do, and so did he,
and when she was alone one day he came
out of the water to lie with her, and she
of course conceived a child. And can we blame
him, or her? Or anyone? But we
are not her father—who thought it a great shame,
and so he killed the girl, which was his right,
and the unborn baby, too—which wasn't, quite.

54 Proteus, Neptune's shepherd, in his fury
sent orcs and seals and other beasts of the sea
to act as his policemen, judge, and jury,
and kill their herds and show his enmity

by destroying their towns and townsfolk in the cure he
had in mind, which was catastrophe
on such a scale that men everywhere would know
that immortal gods should not be insulted so.

55 The islanders retreat to their city walls
but the orcs lay siege to them on every side.
This confinement of the people quickly galls
and after much discussion they decide
that there may be some arcane protocols
only an oracle would be qualified
to recommend. They go and ask their question
and get in return a horrible suggestion—

56 that they must find a maiden equal in beauty
to the princess Proteus loved and sacrifice
her on the shore instead. This woeful duty
may satisfy the god. It isn't nice,
but it is needful. And this substitute he
may accept as a fair and proper price
for the insult he has borne. And he'll no more
come killing and marauding along the shore.

57 If the one you choose does not please him, then
you must find another and then yet another
until he is content. So you do it again
and again until it works. This was a bother,
and the burden fell on the prettiest girls when
they were set out for the dreadful orc to gather
and swallow whole. And other orcs were waiting
for the lovely maidens they were anticipating.

58 True? Not true? This is the local belief
at any rate, and feminists objected,
demanding, cajoling, and begging for relief
in a situation that had to be corrected.

It's true that the lot of women is full of grief,
but this was more than any of them expected.
The islanders agreed that it was unfair,
but that's what life is, always and everywhere.

59 Aside from the unfairness of it, the sad
truth was that the island's population
was not very large, in which case they had
to go abroad for a greater accumulation
of candidates. They knew that this was bad,
but what choice had they, given the depredation
the orcs would otherwise make? So off they go
in search of victims to the god below.

60 With galleys, caravels, and sloops they are
on the *quí vive*, roaming northern waters
to flatter and cajole (young women are far
too disposed to listen) the fairest daughters,
or else, with cutlass, dirk, and scimitar
they fight for them. Or to avoid such slaughters,
they purchase them. This happens, I'm afraid,
often enough, and young girls are betrayed.

61 Are you with me now? Or ahead of me? The connection
is obvious enough. The galley passes
that very beach on which, without protection,
Angelica lies unconscious. They're looking for lasses,
but they also need water. In the course of their inspection
of this rocky coast they find on the sea grasses,
the lovely girl with the pious father, asleep.
Him, they don't care about much, but her they'll keep.

62 And the question is what kind of world is this
in which such virtue and beauty are treated so?
How cruel can Fortune be, thus to dismiss
the qualities of this maiden and let her go

to be a meal for sea-monsters! She is
the one for whom King Agrican was brought low
when he came from the Caucasus to invade Cathay
but met Orlando on that mortal day.

- 63 Ah, this great beauty who once made Sacripant
pant and put her before his honor and throne;
this beauty who blotted the fame of the Lord of Anglant—
Orlando, who by her was quite undone;
this beauty for whom the whole East, bouleversant,
stood ready to do her bidding, is now alone
with no one to help her here in what has occurred
to raise a finger or utter a single word.
- 64 She's sleepy, remember, having been drugged, and they chain
her up before she's awake and take her aboard,
along with the hermit enchanter. (Who can explain
why they need him?) There are other women stored
in the hold as orc food. They weep, but all in vain.
With a brisk following wind, they make way toward
home where Angelica is locked up in a tower
to await her turn on the fateful day and hour.
- 65 But because she is so beautiful, so striking,
her jailors let the other girls go first,
not so much out of kindness but not liking
it that to such perfection should come the worst
imaginable death. But to satisfy king
and sea god, her turn comes for the accursed
presentation to the orc. All crying
they lead her down to the beach—her place of dying.
- 66 What an outpouring of grief—beyond description,
as the shrieks of lamentation reach the skies.
They chain her, spread-eagled, in a crucifixion
on the cold rock where the waves' spume never dries.

It would be an utterly heart-rending depiction that I cannot manage just now. Let us our eyes elsewhere then for something rather more cheerful, for I confess that I myself am tearful.

- 67 Who needs such verses, full of grief and woe?
My spirits must revive. It seems to me
that even raging tigers, bereaved of their so
charming kittens could not without pity see
Angelica bound to that cliff, and there is no
poisonous desert viper that would not be
on the verge of tears, considering her condition,
which is why we have to take an intermission.
- 68 If only Orlando had known, but he's away
in Paris to look for her. Or if either knight
(Sacripant or Rinaldo), led astray
by crafty Atlas had somehow guessed her plight,
they would have risked a thousand deaths to slay
the orcs. But what can they do for her? They are quite
removed from her predicament, so if they knew
there would be nothing whatever that they could do.
- 69 Meanwhile, at Paris, Charlemagne is just
surviving, besieged as he is by Agramant, son
of King Troyan, and he knows that soon he must
surrender himself, the city, and everyone
who lives in it. But still he puts his trust
in heaven that sees and manages what is done
on earth. He prays for help, and not in vain,
for the skies provide it in the form of rain.
- 70 Or not just rain, but, say, a great deluge
that puts the fire out of the Saracens,
for the emperor's prayer to his rock and his refuge
had not gone unheard. Sometimes virtuous men's

requests on earth are answered by the huge
power of heaven almighty that defends
the devout who well deserve its intervention—
like Charlemagne whose goodness we need not mention.

71 At night, Orlando's thoughts are flying about
on the feathers that stuff his pillow, and his head turns
and tosses. He tries to focus his mind without
success and these notions, whirling about like perns
in a gyre, or, say, like moonbeams put to rout
as they bounce off the surface of water and one discerns
on the ceiling a dance of their tiny lights that are acting
as if they were terrified—it can be distracting.

72 Recurrent among the mental jumble is one
thought that keeps coming back—or say it never
departed—of her who came from Cathay where the sun
rises each morning. Orlando is forever
broken-hearted, having lost her. Upon
this grief his mind is fixed, and his endeavor,
since the rout of Charlemagne outside Bordeaux,
is finding her again—but where did she go?

73 This is the source of Orlando's sorrow. Again
and again he turns it over in his mind,
wondering where she might be, and how and when
he might contrive somehow to follow and find
and protect the woman he loves. And he says then
to himself, "How badly I've acted, and how unkind
I've been to you, my dear. It is to my shame, O
precious one, that I turned you over to Namor,

74 "the Bavarian duke, who was to give you protection.
I never felt right about that, and had I complained
to Charlemagne, he might have heard my objection
and granted my wish. And of course it always remained

open to me to go in another direction
and offer to keep you by force, and that would have obtained
our happiness, for who would make bold to bar me
from what I wanted—in all of Charlemagne’s army?

- 75 “And why did he give her to Namor when he could
have put her in some fortress in Paris or
elsewhere? That would have been just as good,
or better in fact. What man in the world was more
bound to protect her than I? Indeed, I should
have fought more for her protection and safety than for
my own heart, eyes, or life! I was sworn to it,
and yet, in the end, I failed and did not do it.
- 76 “Oh, my sweet thing, my darling, where are you now?
How do you fare without me? Are you like a lamb
that has wandered away from the rest of the flock somehow
and as the light fails is bleating in fear? I am
afraid that the wolf may hear you. Is my vow
to care for you not worth a tinker’s dam?
I am the wretched shepherd weeping for you
but uselessly, for there’s nothing I can do.
- 77 “And where are you now, my hope, my love, without
my protection? Do wicked wolves surround you,
their slathering jaws agape as they circle about
their prey? That delicate flower that I found, you
beautiful blossom the angels gave me, I doubt
that you can survive untouched, unplucked, your dew
still on those lovely petals. Or have they by force
taken you? I worry about that, of course.
- 78 “And if the worst that I can imagine has come
to pass, what can I wish for but a quick
death? O God, I pray to you to have some
mercy. Afflict me some other way, sick,

crippled, blind, dishonored, deaf and dumb,
but spare her. Otherwise, I shall have to pick
some painful form of suicide.” Thus he spake,
shedding bitter tears in his heartache.

79 Everywhere in the world living creatures took
their ease on feather comforters or straw
pallets, or even hard cold ground, but look,
there is Orlando, sleepless, grinding his jaw
as if his thoughts were material. The hook
of guilt is fastened deep within your maw,
and like a fish you flounder in your bed
while ghastly pictures fill your tormented head.

80 He is on a river bank, all sweet
with fragrant flowers perfuming the air,
and there is his beloved, come to meet
him with glistening eyes, and everywhere
birds sing as she approaches on dainty feet.
His heart beats fast for the perfection there
that gives his life its meaning. All he asks
is the sunlight of her smile in which he basks,

81 and all he wants in life is for this to go
on forever, but a storm arising
blows the flowers down. The trees bow low
and tear loose in a gale that is chastising
their innocence and helplessness. There is no
shelter anywhere from its brutalizing.
Aquilo, Auster, and the Levant together
struggle with one another in this foul weather.

82 And somehow—he hasn’t the vaguest idea when
or how it happened—he loses her in the thick
wind and rain. He calls to her again
and again, but he has no voice at all (is he sick?).

He's cursing himself while he's looking for her, and then
he hears her call to him for help and quick.
But his legs are weak and all he can do is crawl
with enormous effort making no progress at all.

- 83 He struggles onward, nevertheless, her bawl
impossibly distant, and he of course increases
his efforts, although he knows his chances are small
to none, and that she's in danger and her release is
most unlikely. Then, like a trumpet call
he hears a deep voice that breaks his heart to pieces:
"You are the most irresponsible of men!
Do not expect to see her face again!"
- 84 He knows that dreams can be false, but it happens, too,
that the things we dream have meaning in daylight,
are omens, auguries, or simply true,
and he gets up, dries his tears, and is ready to fight
but more effectively than he could do
in the nightmare. He equips himself with his bright
plate armor and then takes *Brigliadoro* (which is
the name of his horse, but you no doubt guessed this).
- 85 Knowing that some of the places he might have to go
and some of the people he might have deal with are not
altogether honorable, he has no
device or coat of arms anyone could blot,
but everything is black as if to show
his sorrow. It is a suit that he once got
from a mighty pasha he killed many years
ago, and now is useful, it appears.
- 86 At midnight he goes off in silence without
saying farewell to a soul, even to his
uncle, whom he very much cares about
(the emperor), or *Brandimart*, who is

his best friend in the world beyond all doubt.
At daybreak, however, when the sun has risen,
Charlemagne finds out that he has left,
and the emperor is both angry and bereft.

87 Charlemagne berates his nephew who
ought to have stayed in this time of terrible trial
as any faithful paladin would do,
and he threatens and insults him, for his guile
or cowardice, or faithlessness, using a few
epithets I will not repeat, to revile
him. If he does not soon return to the king,
he will learn that the royal displeasure is no small thing.

88 Brandimart was pained to hear this kind
of talk, for he loved Orlando every bit
as much as he loved himself. He rode off to find
his friend . . . To bring him back? Or to warn him that it
had angered the king that he had left. His mind
was so fixed on Orlando that he could omit
to say farewell to Fiordiligi, his true
love, lest she try to dissuade him from what he must do.

89 She was a woman of prudence, manners, beauty,
whom Brandimart seldom left alone, but he
reasoned with himself that this was his duty,
and more than likely, by nightfall, he would be
back in her presence—for this was not a pursuit he
expected to take very long. But as we shall see,
one thing leads to another, and what we intend
is not necessarily how our day will end.

90 Fiordiligi waited a month, but with no
word from him she worried and also burned
with desire for him. Indeed, she longed for him so
that she could not simply wait until he returned,

but she set out to find him, willing to go
through many lands and climes, as you will have learned
soon enough, but of this loving pair
we must postpone the account, which I'll give elsewhere.

- 91 First we must attend to Anglant's knight,
Orlando, that is, who went to the gate and said.
"I am the count." The captain said, "All right,"
and lowered the drawbridge. Orlando went ahead
and down the road and soon was out of sight.
What then befell our fine high-spirited
hero? But we are both fatigued, and so no
more until we resume in Canto Nono.

Canto Nono

- 1 Look at the power of Love and what he can do
not just to anyone but even the best
of men! In Orlando, the noble paladin, who
feels his allegiance to Charlemagne in his breast,
he comes to invade, distract, and corrupt. By the true
and Holy Church he is no longer possessed.
For his uncle, his soul, his God, he seems not to care.
His attention is focused entirely elsewhere.
- 2 But who am I to criticize him, afflicted
with the same failings and subject to the same
distractibility as I've depicted
in him? Let us not be too quick to blame,
but watch in a generosity unrestricted
as the knight in black departs, feeling no shame,
and without a thought for his friends who need him, hence,
picking his way among the Moorish tents.

- 3 But the tents are sodden lumps of cloth, and the troops
have climbed the trees to try to keep themselves dry.
They perch like crows up in the branches in groups
of three or four or more. A few have found high
ground on which to stretch out in the soups
of mud beneath a gray and still threatening sky.
They're sleeping and he could kill more than a few,
but this he does not want to pause to do.
- 4 His hand never grips the hilt of Durindana
(which is, you may have guessed, the name of his blade).
It is less than sporting not to give a man a
chance to defend himself. On his promenade
he finds now and then one who's awake—but can a
Moor have seen Angelica? And will he aid
Orlando? (He's wearing Moorish armor, let
me remind you, and seems to be one of their set.)
- 5 It also helps that he knows their language too
and can speak not just in French but in Arabic,
so that he can chat them up, as he has to do
to get the information no Catholic
or Frank would be offered. As he passes through
their camp for several days, determined, heart-sick,
there is no word of her, no faintest trace,
and he decides to try in another place.
- 6 He expands his search, first to the suburbs and then
to all the rest of France—beyond Auvergne,
Gascony, Brittany, down to Provence. And when
he has made no progress at all and cannot discern
any hint of her from Christian or Saracen,
he is not dismayed, but, patient, he seeks to leagne
where she could be. She has to be somewhere!
And all he has to do is get himself there.

- 7 It was late in October when Orlando began his search
when the leaves fall from the trees, and naked boughs
no longer offer birds a comfortable perch
so that they fly to the south where they carouse
the winter away, while the white bark of the birch
over the white ground perhaps may house
a snowy owl. Our knight looked high and low,
but with no result. And did he despair? No,
- 8 he continued on to the spring when the first green
shows itself, and he wandered far and wide.
He came to that river—you know the one I mean—
between the Normans and Bretons. From one side
he wanted to cross, but the little bridge was clean
washed away in the flood of snow melt. He tried
to find a place to ford, but the water's race
was frothy and churning white in every place
- 9 where the paladin looked. He was not a fish
that could swim across, or a bird that could fly. Ah, there
is a small boat coming toward him—as if his wish
has been heard and granted. And back in the stern where
you would expect a boatman, a womanish
figure sits, a maiden who takes great care
not to come too close to the shore where he
might try to come aboard, even violently.
- 10 Or is it something else? Does she conceal
some motive here? She sees the puissant knight
and might it occur to her to make a deal
and enlist him in some cause of hers to fight?
Orlando makes it clear to her that he'll
be very grateful if she will expedite
his crossing of the river. She replies
that she needs a favor from him and lowers her eyes.

- 11 What favor could this be? “You must give your word
that if I get you across the river then you
within the month will go with your sharp sword
to join the Hibernian king and his army to
destroy Ebuda, of which you may have heard—
a wicked island, evil through and through,
the vilest and the most cruel that the sea
encircles. It is a font of misery.
- 12 “They send their lawless people out to prey
on women whom they kidnap and bring back
to feed to a sea monster that once a day
comes to the shore for its grisly meal on the black
rocks of the island. And it prefers, they say,
beautiful maidens—of which there is now a lack
among the native population of late,
so they import others for this dreadful fate.
- 13 “If any pity dwells in your heart, if some
memory remains of your knightly oath,
or if you have ever felt love either for or from
some woman in your life, do not be loath
to grant my wish and end this martyrdom
of innocent maidens that makes the world wax wroth.
Chivalry, as I have always understood
it, loves such an opportunity to do good.”
- 14 Orlando agreed at once, his motive being
not only the chance of a general benefaction,
but something rather more particular, seeing
a chance that this woman’s invitation to action
might bring him to Angelica, and the freeing
of innocent maidens might not be an abstraction
but exactly what he had been trying to do.
This was a possibility he should pursue.

- 15 Having made this remote connection, he became increasingly convinced that it was right that the woman's need and his were indeed the same and the long-odds chances quickly became quite a sure thing. He felt cheerful that the game was now afoot—or say afloat. That night he found a ship departing from St. Malo and heading exactly where he wanted to go.
- 16 They make good progress, passing St. Briec to port and coasting along Brittany's shore on the way toward Albion, but winds that make such sport of the plans of men turn around, and in one day the progress of four is undone, and in very short order they are taken aback, as they say in nautical terms. It is all the pilot can do to save the ship (and of course himself and the crew).
- 17 How sturdy a ship looks in port, and then how fragile it is when it puts out to sea, as delicate as cut crystal goblets when lovers quarrel and scream intemperately, and start to throw things like some tragedienne doing her mad scene. But let that be. They play the terrible cards the gods have dealt and survive to arrive at last at the River Scheldt.
- 18 No, no, you don't have to look it up. It flows through Antwerp, which is, I think, on the right bank (that's looking toward the ocean, I suppose). No sooner have they lowered their gangplank when a very old man approaches. White hair flows from his head and beard. Immediately he goes to Orlando who he thinks is their leader—yes, to ask him to help a maiden in distress.

- 19 All these old guys and maidens make it tough
to keep a story running in a more
or less straight line. The old man does his stuff,
telling Orlando how the girl ashore
is beautiful, pleasant, and in more than enough
trouble to deserve a hearing for.
All other knights who appear by land or sea
meet her and give their counsel. And so should he.
- 20 What more need be said? Orlando is game
and rushes ashore to follow the old man to
an impressive palace. (It would be a shame
if she lived in a cottage, as some maidens do.)
They make their way up a steep hill and aim
at the tippy-top for Orlando's interview
with the sad maiden. They ascend a stair-
case draped in black mourning everywhere.
- 21 There at the top of the stairs, in a somber room
festooned with more black, he saw a woman, sad
beyond sad, oppressed, one might say, with gloom.
She welcomed the knight in a husky voice that had
no quaver but the timbre of a tomb
inviting him to sit and to hear the bad
things that had happened, reducing her to this
misery, all the worse for her glimpse of bliss.
- 22 "I was the Count of Holland's daughter," she said
to the knight. "There were two brothers, but I was
the apple of his eye and was cosseted.
He granted my every whim, as a father does
to an only daughter. Rich, adored, well-bred,
I was as happy and as carefree as
any girl can be. This was my state
when the Duke of Zeeland entered through our gate.

- 23 “He was on his way to Biscay in order to fight
against the Moors, a brave and handsome man,
and all the passion in me I’d kept for the right
man and moment blossomed, as it can
in a young maiden’s heart and, being quite
head-over-heels in love with him, I began
to believe—as I still believe—that he loved me,
which is how I’d always supposed it would have to be.
- 24 “During those days there were ‘contrary’ winds, that is
contrary to what he and his men
desired, but I was delighted to have his
company longer so that we could then
amuse each other, talk, and sometimes kiss.
He gave me his most solemn promise that when
he returned we should be man and wife,
and love each other even more than life.
- 25 “Bireno—that was the name of the man whom I
loved—had barely left us to go to war
when we heard from the King of Frisia, close by
across the river, that he desired me for
a wife to his only son, Arbante. But my
desire was elsewhere than for this poor
substitute for the man to whom I had
given my word. And I informed my dad
- 26 “that I had pledged myself to Bireno. I had
given my word. And beyond that, my love.
My bitter tears showed I was feeling bad.
I would rather die, I swore by the heavens above,
than marry this man. My father then forbade
any further crying. He was solicitous of
my feelings and he promised to protect
me from a match that I chose to reject.

- 27 “To this, however, the haughty Frisian king
took great exception, umbrage, and offense.
He was so roused that he decided to bring
an armed force against Holland and commence
a war that he thought could end in the marrying
of Arbante and me, and derive some recompense
for the unprovoked insult that he believed
he, his son, and his country had received.
- 28 “His is a mighty army in any case,
with courage and strength and unconstrained by any
compunctions whatsoever when they face
an enemy. But they also have an uncanny
weapon, nothing like the sword or mace,
but able to deal distant death to many
men at once, a fearsome thing indeed
with noise and smoke, and it makes men fall and bleed.
- 29 “It is an iron tube, about four feet,
closed at one end, and into it he puts
an iron ball and powder that fire’s heat
will cause to explode when some brave soldier shuts
his eyes and touches the fuse with a spark. They meet
and the ball is spat out with much noise: it cuts
through anything in its path, flesh, brick, or stone,
leaving utter ruin where it has gone.
- 30 “With this infernal engine he put to rout
our army and then again. It was in the first
that he killed my brother—the ball went in and out
and took his heart. But that was not the worst,
for in the other, when there was no doubt
of the outcome, my other brother’s body was pierced
from back to front, for he had turned away,
just for the moment, I think. But who can say?

- 31 “My father, reduced to a single fortress, held
on as long as he could, although he knew
what the outcome would be here on the River Scheldt.
And yet a man must do what a man must do.
As he was checking the guard posts he was felled,
struck between the eyes by one of those who
kill from a distance with that machine. His sun
never set but was eclipsed by that gun.
- 32 “With my brothers and father dead, I was left as the sole
heir to the island of Holland. The Frisian king
announced that he’d grant to me and to the whole
country a peace, if I would do that thing
I had refused before and marry that vole
of a son of his, Arbante. That would bring
him control of our country—which his heart
and mind had fixed on from the very start.
- 33 “It wasn’t only because I hated them
for having killed my brothers and my father,
and having sacked my country with mayhem,
rapine, and pillage such that I should rather
not go into details but still contemn,
there was my sacred oath, which, you may gather,
I had not at all forgotten—that I would say ‘No,’
to any suitor other than Bireno.
- 34 “So I answered the Frisian king, telling him that
for each ill I now suffer I would be willing
to suffer a hundred more, to be had at
by wild beasts, or endure some other killing
entertaining to such a kakistocrat
as he was, and then, if he thought it thrilling,
he could have my ashes thrown before
the winds or scattered from some desolate shore.

- 35 “My people, I am afraid less firm than I,
tried to persuade me that I should change my mind
to save the city. They did not want to die
only because of my stubbornness. Meanwhile, behind
my back, they surrendered and promised to comply
with the Frisians’ rule. Was I still disinclined
or would I now give in, their king asked me,
suggesting that it was already a fait accompli.
- 36 “What choice did I have? Would I not now consent?
I’d have been willing to give up my life instead
of marrying Arbante, if that had not meant
destruction for the city. (And still, in my head,
there was my thirst for revenge, and I was intent
on extracting that from them.) So what I said
was, I confess, a dissimulation but
what is a girl to do, I ask you? What?
- 37 “I beg the king’s pardon and tell him that I am keen
to be his daughter-in-law. But I have a pair
of friends, two valiant brothers who have been
faithful to me since earliest childhood and care
enough for me to lay down their lives. In serene
confidence in these brothers, I lay bare
the details of my plan, and they give their oath
that they will help and that I can trust them both.
- 38 “One of them goes to Flanders to find a boat.
The other I keep with me in Holland while
the foreigners and all the locals of note
prepare for a lavish wedding of high style.
But word comes that Bireno from remote
Biscay with officers and rank and file
soliders is on the way. I’d told him how
we’d lost, and he was making all haste now.

- 39 “What I have heard the king has also heard,
and he puts out with his entire fleet
to battle with the duke, while his absurd
son remains behind where he’s to complete
the nuptials, which are not to be deferred.
On the high seas, then, the king and the duke meet
and it’s a rout. Bireno’s ships all burn
and he is captured, as we only later learn.
- 40 “Back here the wedding takes place. I cannot evade
or avoid it. There is a party, dismally grand,
to celebrate the event, which I am afraid
seems to me grotesque. You understand
that there are toasts and feasting, and music is played,
but the hour grows late and we get to the demand
the groom makes that the time has come to go
to bed and there is no way to say, ‘No.’
- 41 “But I had prepared for this. Behind the bed-
curtains my faithful servant had been hidden,
waiting for us to arrive, as I had said
he should, and ready to do as I had bidden—
to bury a huge ax in Arbante’s head.
He fell down like an ox, and then I did an
awful but delightful thing and slit
his throat with my knife—and he bled quite a bit.
- 42 “The blow of the ax was for him, but my coup de grace
was for his father, King Cimosco, who had
killed my father and both my brothers, alas,
and wanted me—not for myself but only to add
territory to Frisia. As soon as
that was accomplished, I believe his bad
plan all along was to kill me as well, for he
had no love, liking, or further need for me.

- 43 “Quickly, before we could be discovered, I
packed a few things and my helper threw a line
from the window to lower me down to his ally
who was waiting with that boat in the bright moonshine,
as we had arranged. He had been standing by,
and the three of us set out making a fine
getaway, I thought, with both of them rowing
and a fair wind in our sail to speed our going.
- 44 “Whether the king was more moved by his sadness
at the death of his son than his anger at me I can’t
say for sure, but I can imagine his madness
when, after defeating Bireno, this arrogant
man returned, expecting to find gladness
but, instead, seeing the town in extravagant
sorrow for Arbante’s murder—and my
disappearance and what that would imply.
- 45 “Grief and rage battle in his heart,
but tears cannot bring the dead back, as he knows.
So hatred wins out, and he contemplates the art
of sweet revenge, thinking wherever he goes,
day and night, of how he will tear me apart,
what fierce instruments he will use to impose
lingering, exquisite pains. My tears and screams
fill his waking thoughts and delight his dreams.
- 46 “Those whom he knew to be friends of mine he kills
and anyone who might have helped me. He
could kill Bireno too, a prospect that fills
him with delight, because it would cause in me
the pain of enduring the worst of all possible ills.
But he stays his hand because Bireno can be
the bait by which he can trap me in his net.
A lovely plan, he thinks, but better yet

- 47 “would be for Bireno to deliver me to him,
and he sets for the duke a limit of a year
to hand me over or face a sordid, grim,
and shameful death. Bireno’s choice will be clear,
for the chances of our both surviving are slim.
My fate will be far worse, he thinks, than mere
death, but will include, as I shall discover,
betrayal by the man who was my lover.
- 48 “I have been doing my utmost for him. I’ve sold
six towns I had in Flanders for money to pay
bribes, but those who sell their honor for gold
cannot be trusted to do those things that they
have promised. Meanwhile, my messengers have told
the Germans and English, but, to my dismay,
they offer only words rather than strong
deeds: they temporize and string me along.
- 49 “In short, I have not been able to do a great deal,
and the year soon comes to an end that the Frisian king
gave Bireno, whose death looms ever more real
with each passing day, and I cannot think of a thing
that I can do to help him—except to appeal
to the king to take me instead, accomplishing
what I suppose he wanted all along.
Suicide, I know, is supposed to be wrong,
- 50 “but what have I got to live for? My father is dead,
and my two brothers as well. The kingdom is gone.
What little I had left is cast like bread
upon the waters, but it sank there like a stone.
Why not then follow my heart and offer my head
in exchange for his? I would beg before his throne
to release the one I love and let him go free
and settle, as he said he would, for me.

- 51 “With no other options open to me I can yet
lay down my life for his, as Alcestis did,
and as I prepare to face death I can get
the satisfaction of making my modest bid
to share her fame for devotion for having let
Admetos live. But the king may take the quid
and not let Bireno free, which would be the quo—
and I should be dead and have no way to know.
- 52 “I can imagine being in some cage
that he has prepared for me, and being put
to the rack or whatever instruments his rage
may prompt him to use upon my body, but
what happens after that? Does he turn the page
and write in Bireno’s name before it’s shut,
so that he dies too and the wretched close
of my life is a jest, and otiose?
- 53 “And this is the rather belated point of my story
that I tell anyone I can. For a guarantee
that after the king has shed my blood and gore, he
will do as he promised, and set Bireno free,
I need someone who can take retaliatory
action, lest the king, once he’s killed me,
kill Bireno too, which would be the most
vile thing he could do to spite my ghost.
- 54 “I have been searching for some champion who
could come with me when I offer myself to the king
of Frisia, and can promise me to do
whatever is necessary to make him bring
his captive forth to freedom and be true
to the oath he made, so that in forfeiting
my life I shall not be cheated of my goal
which would be an affront to my immortal soul.

- 55 “Up to now, I have found no one who will swear that when I surrender myself, and it seems that the king will not free the duke but still hold him in prison, he will not permit me to be taken. But as I say, until now all the men I’ve asked freely admit their fears of the king’s weapons with their great and deadly effect on the thickest armor plate.
- 56 “Now, if your inner virtue does not differ from your gallant outer bearing and you can help me in this with a resolution stiffer than what I’ve found in any other man, then be so kind as to come with me there, if for no other reason than honor, so that my plan may be perfected. Promise this to me, and, though I die, my spirit will yet be free.”
- 57 It was at this point that the maiden finished speaking having broken off from time to time to sob or sigh. Orlando, hearing what she was seeking and never averse to any chivalric job, answered her with brevity that that weak king was not a threat or a cause for her heart to throb in worry of any kind. Orlando swore at once to do what the maiden asked and more.
- 58 She is not to put herself in the king’s hands. This is not needed, for he will save them both with his strong sword. We need no deodands, for there are other ways that he is not loath to use, and he has rather better plans. The winds are fair, as if they too were wroth at what this king had done. “Let us make haste toward Holland,” he says, “for there’s no time to waste.”

- 59 Tacking this way and that through the lagoon,
the boatman passes by one island and then
the next in the intricate series and very soon
they reach the tricky coast of Holland when
Orlando can disembark just before noon,
but he leaves the maiden behind and is once again
reassuring: the scoundrel will die before
she should set foot upon her native shore.
- 60 In his fine armor, Orlando, on a steed
born in Denmark but Flanders bred and greater
in size and strength than agility and speed,
disembarks. (Your humble versificator
can report that *Brigliadoro*—who would exceed
all but *Rinaldo's Bayard*—will come along later
from *Brittany* where his master will certainly find
this spirited mount again. But keep him in mind.)
- 61 Orlando arrives at *Dordrecht* where, at the gate,
there is a larger than usual force of men,
either because the regime was new and great
dangers are more to be expected then,
or else there had been a rumor that the state
was in peril from a fleet that had set out when
some cousin of *Bireno's* had word that his kin
was taken captive and being held within.
- 62 Orlando sends one of the men inside
to report that a knight errant has come to fight
with lance and sword. He appeals to the king's pride
but also his hatred, which he knows is quite
a powerful motive. His win will get him the bride
(and killer) of *Arbante*, who is a slight
distance away, and ready to be produced,
but if he loses, his prisoner must be loosed

- 63 and Bireno must be permitted to go free.
The messenger goes inside to report to the king,
whose first thought (as we supposed that it would be)
is trickery and what underhanded thing
he can do to exploit the situation. He
has a conscience that never felt the slightest sting,
wouldn't recognize honor if somehow
he stepped in it, and is not bothered now.
- 64 The knight is here, and the woman, too. His plan
is to send a group of thirty men or so
out by another gate in the walls. They can
come around behind this irksome foe,
and when he can see them from the bartizan,
he and a squad of thirty more will go
out through the gate, ready to meet this knight—
to hunt him down like a beast rather than fight.
- 65 Have you ever been to Volana on the sea
where pink flamingos flock? The fishermen there
use huge nets in their shallow lagoon and we
watched them herd the fish. One might compare
the plan of the king to this activity
on the Adriatic out in the salt sea air.
(I saw them there one summer from the shore
and thought it might make an elegant metaphor.)
- 66 You take my point—it wasn't sporting at all,
and on every road the king had men on post
so Orlando couldn't escape when, outside the wall,
he saw that he was surrounded and all was lost.
The king could not use the deadly cannon ball,
wanting Orlando alive, so that he could be most
useful later on for bait or to trade
in the games that King Cimosco always played.

- 67 He is like a fowler who saves birds that are small
to use as lures to attract the larger and more
valuable creatures, alert to all
methods and opportunities. But before
he could capture Orlando and install
him in some prison cell or mirador,
the knight broke through the circle of men the king
had placed around him. It was a hell of a thing!
- 68 The knight of Anglant lowered his spear wherever
the men were thickest and did a wonderful job
of skewering them seriatim in a clever
maneuver to make a human shish kebab.
Or frogs lined up on a hunter's spear (they never
stop until it's full)? That last poor job
for whom there was no room left fell to the ground
exsanguinating from his mortal wound.
- 69 But a half a dozen fighters en brochette
is about as many as even a very strong lance
will take, and Orlando's breaks. He fights on yet
with his sword, thrusting and hacking at every chance,
killing a mounted soldier or meeting the threat
of one on foot whose blade doesn't even glance
off the paladin's shield. He runs him through
and his cloak runs scarlet where it had been blue.
- 70 All colors run to crimson, green and gold,
white and black, as the knight lays on about
him in one of those battles of which we are told
in legends. There are grunts, an occasional shout,
and many groans. Cimosco regrets his bold
choice—not to use the fire-tube without
which it seems there's not much chance to win
against this man. He orders it brought in.

- 71 Or out, I should say—for the tube is behind the wall,
where those who have been sent to fetch it find
that they are a good bit safer after all
inside, and they'd much rather stay behind
its bulk. The king sends more. His royal bawl
produces no results though. In his mind
the idea forms that he'd be safer too
if he did what he'd seen the others do.
- 72 He turns around immediately in his saddle
and heads his horse for the gate as fast as the beast
can go. His men all see him and they skedaddle
too, and he has the portcullis released
and the drawbridge raised in order that the battle
be kept outside, but Orlando, quick as a greased
pig, gets into the town. The king keeps going
and at his heels the knight is somewhat slowing.
- 73 He's on a Belgian draft horse, which is not
best for racing. Although it has furry feet
and lots of strength, the thing it has not got
is speed, but the king's charger is quite fleet.
Orlando does the best he can to spot
the man racing ahead down a narrow street
and around the corner where he disappears.
Orlando slows down a bit, but perseveres.
- 74 The king is now desperate enough to use his ace
in the hole, and he orders that his nasty fire-
tube be brought and, in a strategic place,
he sets it up. Now he can bid good-bye, or
better, good riddance to this knight, whose case
is that of a boar that's crashing through the briar
only to find the hunter who all along
has waited there with his dogs to do him wrong.

- 75 And the boar, having been trapped this way, grows fierce
and fights in desperate fury that does it no good
but pleases the hunters who with their lances pierce
its bristly hide, and rivulets of blood
run down its flanks. And when Cimosco hears
Orlando approach, he smiles as the hunter would.
He touches the flame to the fuse and takes a breath,
waiting for the explosion that brings death.
- 76 The bang is terrific. The walls of buildings shake.
Even the ground shivers beneath the feet.
Those who are standing close feel the earth quake.
The deadly missile streaks along the street,
making an eerie whistle. But there's a mistake
in the way the device was aimed or timed. The sweet
catastrophe the king had in mind does not
ensue, and Orlando survives the cannon shot.
- 77 Maybe the king's hand trembled? Maybe divine
providence protected the paladin?
(It certainly suits our purposes, yours and mine,
for if our hero were to have been done in,
where would the poem go?) But he's just fine,
although the poor, huge horse is not, having been
shot in the belly. It lies dead on the ground,
from which Orlando rises in a bound,
- 78 all the stronger, as once did Antaeus
from the Libyan sands, and now he's really mad.
He races through the smoke, making his way as
fast as he can. The devastation is bad,
but like a bolt from above that makes men pray as
terror fills their hearts, our noble lad
pursues the wicked Frisian king who turns
to flee, but cannot. Orlando's spirit burns

79 and his feet are even more swift than anyone can
imagine. He's faster now on foot than he was
before on the Belgian horse, as if he ran
not on the ground but above it. Soon he has
in his grasp the terrified king, that wicked man
who so richly deserves what the paladin now does.
He raises his sword and hacks the king's helmet in twain—
to show white bone, red blood, and pale gray brain.

80 Oddly enough, he sits on his horse upright
for a moment or two until Orlando touches
him, and he falls over, as he well might
in his condition. Then there's a noise such as
a battle might produce! But it's all right.
It's Bireno's cousin come to save from the clutches
of the Frisian king his kinsman. He saw that the gate
was open and he did not hesitate.

81 The townsmen and women ran every which way, afraid
and having no faintest idea who in the hell
these soldiers were, although they all displayed
insignia of Zeelandish personnel.
But good news travels fast, and soon it made
the people stop, turn around, and then wish well
those who had come to aid them against the king
of Frisia, free Bireno, and to bring

82 peace and justice. They all said that they never
liked the Frisians, because they had killed their old
ruler, were cruel and greedy, and also clever,
bringing miseries grave and manifold.
Orlando, the intermediator, ever
helpful, joined them together. And behold
they all were friends, except for the Frisians, whom
they hunted down and then killed, I assume.

- 83 That's one of the risks of war, I suggest, and peace is not without its dangers too. The fighting may subside a little while or even cease for good, but there remains the harsh requiring for real and even imagined injuries. These Hollanders were not by any means writing a new page in the chronicles that rehearse such incidents (many of them far worse).
- 84 They do not trouble themselves to search for a key to the prison but they break down its heavy door. Bireno emerges into liberty and tells Orlando that he is grateful for what the brave knight has done, and in amity they travel in procession toward the shore where Olympia is waiting (that's her name, which I've been deferring, in a kind of game.)
- 85 You remember her! She was the one Orlando brought here. She hadn't expected that he would do more than preside at her death and see her demand (oh! modest and sweet) was fairly fulfilled. But you never know what to expect from these knights, and (oh frabjous day!) her husband, as good as new, is approaching and they are both alive. They kiss not having expected it might turn out like this!
- 86 The people cheer themselves hoarse and at once agree to restore her to the throne and swear to her to be faithful and true (as subjects can ever be). She tells them she is grateful but would prefer Bireno to have the control of the state. And he turns to a cousin of his to administer the castles and estates. Bireno is busy with other pressing projects now. (Or is he?)

- 87 He's off to Zeeland now, with Olympia too,
to fight with the Frisians, because he has been told
a king's daughter is one of the people who
have been taken captive there and is much extolled.
Bireno has a brother, and she will do
quite well for a wife for him in their household.
This shouldn't take very long, he says, and then
he and Olympia will return again.
- 88 And neither is Orlando hanging around.
He departs, having taken but one
thing—that machine of fire, iron, and sound,
a weapon of mass destruction, that terrible gun,
which he does not want for his own use, having found
it to be unfair and unsporting; only a son
of a bitch would think to use it in a fight.
It isn't at all appropriate for a knight.
- 89 It ought to be destroyed, he thinks, to keep
anyone from ever making use
of it against men to kill and to estrepe.
He cannot think of any sane excuse
for it to exist, and he throws it into the deep
of the sea to make men and women safer, whose
futures will not be blighted by such an obscene,
inelegant, and dangerous machine.
- 90 He also finds it politically incorrect
in the way it makes a weak man equal to
the strongest, so that all rank and respect
are fundamentally threatened, for otherwise who
would know his place or observe all the correct
distinctions? Civilization as he knew
it would be over; equality would reign.
The very idea gives our paladin pain.

- 91 When he's out of sight of land he takes the vile
thing with all its component parts—the balls,
the powder, and all the rest—and, with a smile
heaves it overboard and as it falls
wishes it good luck, that it may defile
that hell from which it came, Beelzebub's halls.
The wind picks up, and his vessel is making speed
to that godforsaken island where orcs feed.
- 92 So eager is our paladin to discover
if Angelica is there and what he can do
to come to her rescue as any chivalric lover
should that he does not stop on the way. (And you
must agree with this—that nothing should come above her
possible peril.) So he sails right on through
past England and past Ireland to that isle
that has been in need of him for quite a while.
- 93 But let us leave him there striking a proud
posture on the boat, up near the bow,
one hand, perhaps for balance, on a shroud.
We must return to Holland, I think, now
that there's to be a wedding with much loud
music and dancing and many toasts. And how
could we miss that? We shall return in good
time to Orlando. This is understood.
- 94 But hold on a moment. Even before we get
to the wedding, there is something else we must
address. There's news. The paper is still wet.
You'll read on, please, and manage to adjust?
I hate to try your patience or forget
my place, or lose your interest and your trust.
Bear with me. It'll be worth it, you betch'em (oh,
it's a wretched rhyme!), in Canto Decimo.

Canto Decimo

- 1 Of all the great love stories through the ages
and of all the tests there have been of fidelity
and devotion, in joy or sorrow, idylls and rages,
none, I think, has ever proved to be
superior to Olympia's, whom the sages
must recognize as the epitome
of faithfulness and honor. No Greek or Roman
tales portray a truer heart in a woman,
- 2 and in modern times, to whom else could we look
for a finer example? All this Bireno knew
having seen the many pains Olympia took
for his sake, and her selflessness. Her true
love for him was written in the book
of her heart that he could never misconstrue
and ought to have used for framing prayers to say
in gratitude and awe each night and day.
- 3 But that he should ever come to abandon her for
another woman—even Helen, the great
beauty for whom they fought the Trojan war—
is every bit as unthinkable as . . . Wait!
That he should abandon his sight or hearing or
his speech or his life itself that he'd value
as worth less than Olympia's love that would
weigh more in the scales than any other good.
- 4 But did he love her as much as she loved him?
Was he every bit as faithful to her as she
was to him? Was he always ready to trim
his sails to accommodate her so they could be

together always? Or is the story a grim
account of his ingratitude such that we,
pained to hear about it, purse our lips,
raise our brows, and put our hands on our hips?

- 5 Ah, ladies, ladies, considering this defect
of love and pity as a reward for one
as good as Olympia was, this incorrect
and quite unjust behavior that the sun
looks down on and the gods can see, reflect
on the faithlessness of men who may have begun
with promises, oaths, and every sign of care—
that disappear in the slightest puff of air.
- 6 Once they have slaked that thirst that made them burn,
their interest wanes and dies. Consider this
and from the woes of other women, learn
how fickle and inconstant a man is.
Be careful, ladies, when it is your turn,
and when some man tries to assure you that his
heart is different, be careful. It's good sense
to acquire this caution at someone else's expense.
- 7 Be specially careful of those whose cheeks are still
downy: in them, as in conflagrations of straw,
the fires of appetite kindle quickly but will
as quickly die out. Or think of a hunter who saw
a hare and now chases it eagerly up a hill
to the top and down again, through gully and draw.
He catches it, then is indifferent, for the pursuit
itself is the prize: they are easy to confute.
- 8 So it is with these young lads. As long
as you are proud and cold to them, they will show
ardor, respect, and a love that seems to be strong,
but as soon as they have achieved their prize, they no

longer care, but stray elsewhere. It's wrong,
but that's how they all are. They are likely to go
after whatever is fresh and new. It has been
this way always. Do not get taken in.

9 I do not mean that you should not allow
yourselves ever to fall in love. Far from it.
Without love, you are like a vine that must bow
because it is not staked and tended. The summit
of human emotion beckons to you now,
but avoid young men who are often callow and dumb. It
is like picking fruit—neither too ripe nor too green.
You're better off with something that's in between.

10 But back to our story. You remember the princess they found
in Frisia, whom Bireno had intended
as a wife for his brother. But let us not fool around.
He wanted the lovely girl for himself—for when did
a man with a morsel as dainty as this feel bound
to pop it in someone else's mouth? This splendid
creature was far too fine for any other
man, Bireno thought, even his brother.

11 A morsel? She was barely fourteen and as fair
as a tight rosebud that has just begun to show
a little pink to the circumambient air
as it basks in the spring sunshine. His passion was so
hot for her that his memory of the affair
with Olympia was extinguished. A fire will go
out when it's drenched in the rain, and its last spark
will glimmer and die, leaving the campsite dark.

12 His mind was fixed upon her face and form.
Her sadness at her father's death, and her tears
only made her lovelier. His warm
feelings were roused, as tender as her years.

Blonde, blue-eyed, size zero, full of charm,
she makes him thirst for her. But when he nears
Olympia, it is all he can do to maintain
the smile on his face that would otherwise show disdain.

- 13 It takes a degree of acting skill to do
what he did before, prompted by feelings that now
are gone or at least have given way to the new.
Sincerity is easy, you will allow,
but feigning, for whatever reason? Only a few
have enough self-consciousness to endow
each look and gesture with what a few hours or days
ago they would have displayed of love and praise.
- 14 And at the same time, he must also conceal his lust
for the young princess, although he is lucky here
because the attention he pays to her seems just
pity and concern. It would be queer
of him not to be concerned. And why distrust
his decency and goodness? The poor dear
needs to be consoled, it is understood,
and Bireno's actions are perceived as good.
- 15 It happens like that quite often, that the way we see
the actions of someone else are utterly wrong.
His nastiness was taken by all to be
the behavior of a decent gentleman, strong
in virtue, pious, and generous as he
wanted the world to suppose—and it went along.
His sailors put out to sea to speed him to
Zeeland. A following wind and a willing crew
- 16 were making good time, but in order to avoid
Frisia, they kept to port until
a wind came up from the east and for three days toyed
with the duke's helpless vessel (as winds will).

They manage somehow not to be destroyed
but find a cove on some island, which was still
waiting for the cartographers to draw it
and even name it after whoever first saw it.

- 17 They landed safely. Olympia went ashore
happy that she was with the unfaithful Bireno.
They supped together, and then with no more
ado, they retired. A tent above the bay—no
palace, of course, but she wasn't asking for
luxury. The sailors stay away—no
orders need be given. They sleep on board,
in deference to the lady and their lord.
- 18 Olympia is exhausted, the buffeting sea,
the dangers they have passed through, the winds, the high
waves that have kept her awake and alert for three
days catch up with her now, and with a sigh
she falls at once into insensibility.
Her sleep is so sound and deep that it could vie
with that of any hibernating bear
curled up for the winter in its hidden lair.
- 19 Bireno, on the other hand, has not
closed his eyes, but with his wicked plan
worked out, has risen silently, has got
his clothes in a bundle, and (oh, wicked man)
he sneaks out of the tent and down to the spot
in the cove where the boat is beached. Maintaining an
absolute silence they put out to sea,
leaving the island abaft and to the lee.
- 20 Olympia, fast asleep, is left behind.
When Aurora scatters the earth with hoar-frost she
hears the sea birds' cries, and full of kind
and loving thoughts reaches out, but he

is gone. She wakes, quite certain that she'll find him just outside somewhere. Still, hurriedly she dresses and leaves the tent. She calls his name, but there is no answer. Is it some kind of game?

- 21 She looks around near the tent and is worried now. She runs down to the beach and finds that their boat is gone. No sign of it. Why? How could he do such a thing? Her call rings out on the air, "Bireno!" And again, but nothing! The slough of despond opens up before her. She tears her hair and sobs, and she peers out at the emptiness but cannot see a thing. In her distress
- 22 she climbs a rock to get a better view. The sun has not yet risen but moon-glow shines on the sea and from the summit . . . It's true! She can make out his sails and in utter woe she understands what's happened. What can she do? "Bireno!" she calls once more but there is no reply, except from the rocks that echo her call. (Mocking? In pity? With no feeling at all!)
- 23 The boat dwindles into the offing. She watches in utter horror, feeling faint, and she falls to the ground and lies there a moment until she catches her breath and rises again, and again she calls, but the cries turn to a series of whimpers that matches the plaintive sounds of the halcyon's caterwauls. She waves but without hope that they will see or, seeing, come back for her in response to her plea.
- 24 "How can that ship not bear my body when it carries my soul?" she asks, but the breaking waves are the only answer she gets. Dejected then, beyond what she can possibly bear, she braves

that surf, resolved to kill herself, and again she tries, but then turns back to the beach. What saves her life—if the plain and simple truth be told—is that she finds the water unpleasantly cold.

25 For rather a long while she stands there staring out at the hostile waves, trying to see the tiny spot that has disappeared. Despairing even of getting another glimpse of him, she turns back to the tent that they had been sharing in another world, another life, before he had revealed himself as a monster, a heartless brute whose deception and faithlessness were absolute.

26 She looks at the tent and blames it as well for how it misled her, conspired with him, and let her think that all was well. And here she is now alone, defenseless, hating her life, and yet afraid of death. She could not disallow such dire possibilities as the threat of wolves, or tigers, or bears, perhaps. They all could be lurking nearby, ready to slash and maul.

27 And she is alone! With no one to help or defend or reassure her. Even worse than that, assuming she comes to a most horrific end as the victim of some predatory cat, who will give her a burial and send her spirit on into the next world? What a dismal prospect! With no one to close her eyes, what's left of her will be the vultures' prize.

28 It is not fear for herself or even true self-pity she feels, but sorrow for her poor remains she imagines rotting under the blue and indifferent eye of heaven. She is weeping for

that theoretical corpse. Bireno, who
reduced her to this, she now blames all the more,
and dies a thousand wretched deaths instead
of the one that would be quick and leave her dead.

29 She turns her mind to more practical matters and looks
for pieces of wood some sailor might have made
into a shelter—for she has read in books
of castaways fashioning rafts to escape—but the glade
offers her nothing whatever to work with. The duke's
heartlessness makes her angry as much as afraid,
and she finds herself scheming and dreaming. Another boat
might happen by this island, however remote,

30 and out of pity take her aboard. But to where?
She would leave the wolves and bears and tigers behind,
but what would be waiting for her in Holland? There
Bireno had his garrisons. She will find
no friendly welcome. It is extremely unfair
that she sold her Flemish towns, having in mind
his release from prison. Where then can she go?
What options remain for her? It is hard to know.

31 Maybe to Frisia then? She could have been queen
there, but decided not to, for his sake.
My father's ruin, my brothers' too! It has been
a catastrophe! It's gone now, and I make
no recriminations. I won't be mean
or vindictive. I admit I have made a mistake,
and it is for others to judge between us two,
considering what he has done and what I do.

32 She thinks again of the boat with the captain's kind
offer to her. But what reason does she have
to suppose that he will be friendly? At once, her mind
is possessed by the notion that rather than simply save

a helpless woman whom they happen to find,
they'll take her captive and sell her as a slave.
Why not? If she's a source for them of cash, a
tidbit to sell to some lascivious pasha?

33 She thinks again of the beasts that for all she knows
the island teems with, but now they seem less bad
than the prospects of harem life in gauzy clothes.
Far better to be torn apart by the mad
and slaving beasts than to be dishonored by those
debauched Orientals! Indeed, she is now glad
to think of her corpse, or pieces of it, drained
of blood and life, but with its honor unstained.

34 She begins to tear her hair out and throw it to
the winds that scatter it over the sand and sea,
and, possessed by a demon, she wanders and wails anew,
as mad as poor Hecuba was at Troy when she
looked down at the corpse of Polydorus, who
had been her last living son. A mind flies free
and leaves the body behind when it suffers a shock.
Hers did, and she is motionless as a rock,

35 gazing out to sea with unseeing eyes.
But we must leave her there for a while, I fear,
and return to Ruggiero, who still tries
in the terrible midday heat to persevere
along the shore. His armor is hot. He fries.
(Or he poaches in his sweat? It isn't clear.)
Trust me, he is very uncomfortable and
it's pure hell on that glaring, burning sand.

36 He is heading, as I hope you will recall,
for Logistilla's castle. And as I say,
it's very hot. There is no shade at all,
and the poor man suffers at every step of the way.

But now he sees a tower, fairly tall,
where three of Alcina's ladies-in-waiting play,
lolling on carpets rather than bare ground
with sorbets, granitas, and cool drinks all around.

37 How pleasant seems their *déjeuner sur l'herbe*,
with every kind of dainty spread before
them for their delectation, and superb
vintages as well. Close by the shore,
the boat that brought them where no one could disturb
their picnic waits for a wind to fill once more
its sail that is now slack in the calm. They greet
Ruggiero and they offer him something to eat

38 and drink, for he is hot and thirsty. His face
is flushed. They tell him it cannot hurt to pause
for a little while at least. It is no disgrace,
however urgent his important cause
may be, to take refreshment. In any case,
his horse could use some water. All the laws
of hospitality compel them, they say, to proffer
at least a drink, and him to accept their offer.

39 One of them approaches his horse to hold
its stirrup while the second, wreathed in smiles,
holds out a glass of bubbly, ice cold,
but Ruggiero, impervious to their wiles,
declines their invitation, for the bold
knight is aware that only a few miles
behind him is Alcina, rushing pell mell
in pursuit of him, the proverbial bat out of hell.

40 And the third of these young ladies? Ah, but suppose
some sulfur and saltpeter is touched with a spark,
for such is the explosion of rage that arose
in her heaving bosom. Her face meanwhile grows dark,

and in her anger she claims that he goes
under false colors—that he is no knight. She is stark
staring mad as she shrieks at him he’s a thief
of his horse and armor and vile beyond belief.

41 People like him, she says, deserve worse than
simply death, which is too good for them. He
should be drawn and quartered first, and then the plan
would be for the corpse to be burnt, or it could be
hung on a tall pole where every man
and woman and child that passes by can see
the crows pick at him and warn their children not
to forget the dreadful smell of human rot.

42 She’s angry because he has spurned what she is quite
sure is her irresistible beauty and hurls
these insults at him, but he is not impolite
and he does not deign to answer the furious girls.
It’s a contest he can’t win and shouldn’t fight.
They get into their boat and one unfurls
the sail, and they follow along with wind and oar,
keeping up with him as he moves along the shore,

43 still shouting imprecations, obscenities, taunts,
and insults, of which they have an unlimited store.
Ruggiero at last reaches the strait and wants
the boatman to help him across to the other shore.
He’s been waiting there with his skiff and not by chance,
for he has been sent and all day has waited for
Ruggiero to make his appearance, as he does now.
The boatman waves to him cheerfully from the bow.

44 If a person’s face is any indication
of what his heart and soul are like, then this
is one deserving Ruggiero’s approbation,
cheerful, discreet, and honorable. He is

also the man whom, in this situation,
Ruggiero needs. He boards and offers his
thanks to God almighty for having taken
care of him and for having saved his bacon.

- 45 The boatman offers congratulations to
Ruggiero for his having survived the wiles
of Alcina, that impossible woman who
gives her enchanted cup to men and smiles
as they turn into a myrtle, pine, or yew
tree. Now that such difficult, dangerous trials
are behind him, he is on his way to the good
Logistilla, where quite soon he would
- 46 confront pure virtue of such a high degree
that she inspires awe in those she meets.
And as they get to know her better, they see
that the kind of love she offers them defeats
any other they have known, for she
does not inspire hope or fear that beats
in a lover's heart, but only satisfaction
in her rare and metaphysical attraction.
- 47 "What she has to teach exceeds in every way
the pleasures of music, of dance, of food and wine,
of luxurious baths and rich perfumes. They say
that one rises higher than hawks in the air in the fine
exaltation she has to offer. It may
even be that the glories they know in divine
precincts in heaven, she makes available here
to mere mortals in this our earthly sphere."
- 48 Thus the boatman is speaking but they are still a
distance from the beach that is their goal,
and behind them, coming up, is a flotilla
of sailors and marines in the control

of angry Alcina, resolved to maim or kill a person she once loved who is the sole cause of her chagrin, far worse than any insult she can remember (there haven't been many).

49 They are bearing down, churning the sea with their speed.
The boatman is concerned or, say, terrified.
“This is no time for fooling around. We need that shield of yours, Ruggiero. Never mind pride, but think of your life and your freedom, and give heed to necessity, which is not to be defied,”
the boatman urges, but Ruggiero appears altogether indifferent to his fears.

50 The boatman then takes matters into his own hands, or rather he takes the shield and tears the cover off it. The splendor that now is shone from its highly polished surface not only scares Alcina's people but blinds them. Like a stone one drops to the deck. Aloft, another fares no better and plummets into the sea to drown among his shipmates swimming all around.

51 Ashore, one of the lookouts who is alert to what is going on rings the alarm to summon the guard to the harbor further to hurt the attackers, and, like so many bees, they swarm. Meanwhile, from above, there is a report of cannon fire to keep Ruggiero from harm. To keep the peace, one must prepare for war—but I dare say that you have heard this before.

52 Four women Logistilla has sent to the strand: brave Andronica, wise Fronesia, just Dicilla, and chaste Sofrosina. They stand together but it's the last of them who must

be more involved than her three companions and she glows as if she's been sprinkled with fairy-dust. They watch as the army, the strongest in the world, proceeds to the beach in order, its banners unfurled.

- 53 Logistilla's navy is ready as well
and at the alarm they man their battle stations
so that both by land and sea, there is a well
organized assault. The preparations
have been wise and shrewd, and in the event, they tell
a story of interest even to modern nations,
for Alcina's ships, more numerous and faster,
experience an absolute disaster.
- 54 From the kingdom she had taken from her sister
she came expecting to capture her fugitive lover,
but all her ships are burning (although they missed her
and she is escaping on the one small vessel of her
fleet remaining afloat). Did they resist her?
Yes, in a rout from which she will not recover!
The triumph of virtue occurs very often in rhymes,
but in the world, too? Well, it can. Sometimes.
- 55 Alcina flees. In the water everywhere
are the wounded, burned, and dying, and she hears
their cries for help and groans, but does she care?
It is only for Ruggiero's loss that tears
roll down her cheeks and she is in despair.
She would die of grief if she could, but careers
of fairies go on forever, as long as the sun
circles the sky in a journey that's never done.
- 56 Had it not been for this peculiar quirk,
Clotho might have reeled up her mortal thread,
or else, like Dido, she could have done the work
herself, with a blade or a rope to wind up dead.

Or shall we imagine a viper that might lurk
in a basket of figs, as Cleopatra is said
to have kept for just such a dire occasion. But each
manner of death we can think of is out of reach.

57 But let us leave Alcina there in her pain
and return now to the worthy Ruggiero, who
was led from the boat and up the road to the main
part of the castle, thanking God he still drew
breath. He is delighted to regain
his footing on dry land—as many do
who come ashore and feel beneath their feet
a motionlessness they find extremely sweet.

58 But then that breath he's just got back is taken
away again, not by fear but awe
as his eyes are dazzled and his very soul is shaken
by the gorgeousness all around him. Who ever saw
entire walls of diamond and garnet? You make an
absurd request—at which I hem and haw—
if you expect me to offer a description
of a place too fine to exist, even in fiction.

59 Let us put it directly: at any look
by any man or woman, what is shown
is not the building but the open book
of the admirer's own soul on display, his own
vices and his virtues, as if he took
a mirror that belonged to him alone
and put himself on display for all to see—
what he was, now is, and what he will be.

60 And seeing himself this way, he becomes at once
more prudent, modest, and therefore on the way
to a general improvement over the months
and years that follow. It is like the light of day

that illuminates one's world, but still he hunts
for meaning, and this otherworldly ray
of inner light is even brighter and shows
to the soul more clearly those truths it dimly knows.

61 The lofty arches appear to hold up the sky,
and beyond them are spacious gardens rich in green
sweet-smelling plantings of the kinds that I
can barely imagine, never having seen
such flowering trees and bushes that defy
the constraining round of the seasons, by which I mean
that in the summertime they bloom and bear
and in winter too in this always gentle air.

62 Such noble and extraordinary trees
grow nowhere else in the world, but only here
are roses, violets, lilies, peonies,
and amaranths of this kind—that need not fear
what other plants experience, for these
are not born, and are immune, it is quite clear,
from age. They do not even bow their heads
to time or death but, in their protected beds,

63 maintain a perpetual freshness and beauty such
that they never turn to dry and withered stalks.
It is not Nature's kindness that gives this much
desired gift, but Logistilla who walks
among their paths and allées, and her touch
protects them and preserves them from the shocks
of the whirling of the stars in the seasons' round,
as if it were always springtime on this ground.

64 Logistilla welcomes Ruggiero with
much praise. She is delighted he is here,
so noble a knight, so famous, almost a myth,
and to her courtiers she makes it clear

that he should be given honor as if he were kith and kin. And at that moment, who should appear but his friend Astolfo, who arrived here not so long ago. They exchange an abbraccio.

65 Within the next few days, the other men Melissa had restored to their proper form greet Ruggiero in friendly fashion. Then Ruggiero and Duke Astolfo go to inform Melissa that they both want to see again their home in the West for which they still have warm feelings. She says she will, at some propitious time, let the good fairy know their wishes.

66 Logistilla replies that in two days she will let them leave, but first she will need to teach the brave Ruggiero that there are ways by which he can control the flying steed that will carry him back to Aquitaine. "He obeys a bit I have designed for him. Indeed, with this Ruggiero can go left and right and up and down at any speed in flight."

67 She has had this bit designed and made and teaches Ruggiero how it should be used to make the hippogryph perform maneuvers, each as his rider instructs. On land at first he should take the animal through its paces, and when he reaches proficiency there, it will be a piece of cake to get him to perform as well in the air and carry him reliably anywhere.

68 Soon he had gained the proficiency and could thank the gentle fairy for her help. They would be friends forever, and she could always bank on him for any service that he could

offer her. With only the slightest clank
of his armor, he mounted the hippogryph that stood
waiting, and he took his leave, while she
watched as he rose and flew out over the sea.

- 69 We'll follow him, and then return to the Brit,
Astolfo, whose story is also worth reciting.
(He returns to Charlemagne, but it
isn't easy. There is lots of fighting.)
Ruggiero, in an exercise of wit,
decides that a different route might be inviting,
last time having come pretty much over water,
with nothing to see—even if it was shorter.
- 70 Why not take a look around? He might
see the cave where Aeolus dwells, or go
around the earth as the sun does every night
before it rises again in the east. Below
there was the vastness of Cathay, alight,
in the cities along the banks of rivers that flow
from the mountains down to the ocean, the Yang-tse,
and the others, the names of which have eluded me.
- 71 On his way there, he sees Mangiana (where-
ever is that?), Sericana, and
Imaus, the Scythian mountains (from the air,
impressive) and then Sarmatia, a strange land
that Ovid mentions, I believe. And there
below, Europe comes to an end and the grand
steppes of Russian Asia continue to
the orient's deserts and mountain chains on view.
- 72 But then he turns to the north so that he can explore
Poland, Hungary, and all the German states.
He's eager to see his Bradamante once more
and plans to do so, but an opportunity waits,

far too attractive for anyone to ignore,
enriching and educational, that the fates
have offered him. And how can he refuse
the chance to inspect so many scenic views?

73 He comes at last to England far to the west.
But do not imagine that all this time he flew
through the air, which would have taken much of the zest
out of his travels. What he liked to do
was come down in the evening and look for the best
food and lodgings on offer for travelers who
appreciate the good life and like pleasant
things. He isn't a pilgrim or a peasant.

74 At last he gets to London where he sees
along the Thames squadrons of men at arms.
Trumpets are blaring, flags wave in the breeze,
and drums are beating loudly to the swarms
of soldiers and retainers—and all these
have, at Rinaldo's call, from estates and farms
come to the aid of Charlemagne in France
whom they'd heard to be in parlous circumstance.

75 Ruggiero arrived as all these troops passed in
parade, and he of course descended to ask
a knight who was observing them with a grin
who were these soldiers massing and for what task
were they assembled. What did they hope to win,
and for whom? The knight forthwith removed his casque
and answered that they were Scottish, Irish, and
English, too, from all parts of the land,

76 and once they are through with this review they will
embark—the boats are drawn up on the shore—
to help the French, besieged, beleaguered, but still
of willing spirit in this protracted war.

But let me identify for you and fill
you in on the units that are disposed before
us under those large banners that you see
with Britain's leopard and France's fleur-de-lys.

- 77 “The commander in chief,” the knight said, “is the bold
Lionetto, nephew of the king.
He is the Duke of Lancaster, and we're told
he has both courage and cunning that he can bring
to the battlefield with other manifold
strengths and virtues. Near him, fluttering
in the wind is the banner of Richard of Warwick, three
ailes argent on a field vert, as you see.
- 78 “That next banner, the one that has the two
antlers with the skull, or as they say
in heraldry a ‘massacre’ (as you knew
I'm sure) is the Duke of Gloucester's display.
The torch is the Duke of Clarence's, or you
could refer to it as a ‘flammant.’ Either way
is fine with me. And then the next one is
a tree that the Duke of York proclaims as his.
- 79 “The lance broken in pieces is the blazon
of the Duke of Norfolk. The thunderbolt is Kent's.
The griffin belongs to Pembroke. The balance on
the banner beyond it Suffolk's, and the sense
of that, I assume, is ‘justice.’ Then upon
the next is the pair of serpents, the preference
of the house of Essex. And then, on a field azure,
is a garland, which is Northumberland's, I'm sure.
- 80 “The Count of Arundel's device that you see is the boat
sinking into the sea. Standing near him
are the counts of Berkeley and March (you may take note
that the first shows mountains and the second one a slim

palm tree). Then the pine log that's afloat
on the waves belongs to the Count of Richmond. The grim
pair beyond are Southampton with the crown
and Dorset with the chariot bearing down.

- 81 “The falcon is that of Raymond, Count of Devon.
Winchester has the yellow and black, and he
of Derby displays a dog to earth and heaven.
Oxford has a bear. And that cross you see
belongs to the Bishop of Bath, who has always striven
to fight for the church. And there, on a field gris,
is the shattered chair of the Duke of Somerset.
Of the men-at-arms and mounted bowmen met
- 82 “here on the field, there are forty-two thousand or so,
and twice as many footmen. A great force!
Those other ensigns, off to the left, I know
are Geoffrey's, Henry's, Ermant's, and Edward's. No horse,
but each of them brings footmen against the foe.
Geoffrey is Duke of Buckingham, of course,
and the others are from Salisbury and
Abergavenny and Shrewsbury. They stand
- 83 “furthest to the east. The Scots are arrayed
off to the west, some thirty-thousand keen
men Zerbino, the king's son, leads. They have made
a lion with a sword in his paw between
two unicorns their emblem. It is said
he is the handsomest man who can be seen
among their people. Nature, it is told,
made him, was satisfied, and broke the mold.
- 84 “There is no one I know or have even heard of who
combines such valor with such strength and grace
as the Duke of Ross, which is the title to
which the son of the king is entitled. In place

beside him stands the Duke of Huntley—blue
field on which is a portcullis d'or. I trace
the caged leopard next of the Duke of Mar,
or that's what I think it is. We're fairly far.

- 85 “And there you see the crest with many hues
and many birds, which belongs to Alcabrun,
who is no count or duke, but of the crews
from the wilder parts of Scotland he is the one
to whom they all defer. That bird that views—
or boldly stares—directly at the sun
is the emblem of the Duke of Trasfordia. He
with the bull and the pair of hounds at its flanks must be
- 86 “Count Lurcanio, who rules in Angus. And there
with fields of blue and white is Albany. Then
is Buchan with the vulture we see tear
the dragon beneath it. Armano and his men
are next, with the white and black. They are from fair
Forbes. And then is Errol from the glen
with the torch on a green field. The Irish too
have come and brought two squadrons with them to do
- 87 “their uttermost. The Count of Kildare leads
the first of these, and the Count of Desmond the second.
The first has the burning pine and the other bleeds
a vermilion band on white. And there have been beckoned
other countries as well to meet the needs
of Charlemagne—Sweden and Norway are reckoned
fine fighters, and many other men are newly
arrived—contingents from Iceland and even Thule.
- 88 “In all those regions, people fond of war
have sent us soldiers, some sixteen-thousand I'd guess,
and they are really something to see: they are more
hairy than beasts and in their aggressiveness

are more than a match for any predator
at home in the jungle's frightening lawlessness.
Their lances carry flags of pure white that they
will dye in the blood of the victims whom they slay.

89 "They live in caves in the forests, and Moratto
is their chief who has brought them here," the knight
explains to Ruggiero, who looks out at what to
his eyes looks sufficient to help the French fight.
He asks about some of the British lords, but in not too
long there are many who come for a closer sight
of the strange, or even unique, beast that he rides,
and in wonder they gather about him on all sides.

90 Ruggiero enjoys this attention and, even more,
the prospect of the amazement that will ensue
when he takes the hippogryph aloft to soar
and bank and swoop above them in the blue
of the clear sky in this performance for
their delight in what the rare beast can do.
He shakes the reins, touches the spurs lightly,
and instantly the hippogryph in its sprightly

91 and graceful fashion ascends into the sky.
Ruggiero hears their oohs and aahs below,
and he dazzles and amazes them, flying high
and then in a sudden swoop coming so low
that they could reach overhead and touch his thigh.
He sweeps across the parade field, to and fro
above each admiring squadron, and then turns west
toward Ireland, the land that Patrick blessed.

92 There is a cave he lived in when he was old
and still there inheres in that place a wonderful power
to purge those of us who visit there, I am told,
of the taint of every dreadful sin of our

maculate souls. Ruggiero then turned his bold
steed out to sea toward Scotland's verdant bower,
but as he looked down he saw, with no small shock,
Angelica, naked, bound to that bare rock.

93 You remember Ebuda, surely, that island of tears?
Those pirates kidnapping beautiful women to feed
to the orcs the sea god had sent to them? Well, it appears
that this was the day upon which it was decreed
that Angelica was to die and all her fears
bloodily realized. (You recall how she'd
been sleeping beside that enchanter when they found her,
seized her, and then most pitilessly bound her.)

94 What can be sadder in life or in literature
than the death of a beautiful woman? What can be worse
than the sacrifice of such a lovely and pure
creature? Therefore in prose as well as verse
it comes up a lot. It's difficult to endure
even the thought, but some of the tales we rehearse
will provide at the last minute a hero who may
deliver her from danger and save the day.

95 And here is the poor girl, totally nude
as the day on which she was born, not even a veil
for the wind to arrange for modesty's sake, lest crude
eyes peer at her jiggly parts, so pale
in the sunlit glare—except for the places you'd
expect to be pink. (I mention this detail
only to show how accurate I can be
and enable you, in your imaginings, to see.)

96 So nearly perfect is she that Ruggiero blinks
and looks again, because at first glance she
appears to be a statue, or so he thinks
until he sees the tears that prove her to be

alive, as each droplet pours down her cheeks and sinks
to her pretty little crab-apple breasts, and he
is deeply moved. (By pity, I should say,
lest you think his inclinations go some other way.)

97 Indeed, as he fixed his eyes upon her he thought
of Bradamante and was at once possessed
by pity and love. In a manly way he fought
back tears he felt welling up and the sighs in his chest.
He had his charger alight, and when he had caught
his breath smiled at the woman and addressed
her in the gentlest words: “The bonds of love
are the only fetters that you should be mindful of.

98 “This predicament of yours cannot possibly be
deserved, and I cannot imagine so cruel a man
as to tie you up this way, but I shall free
you and then punish in any way I can
the one or the many who did this thing.” And she
who hated to show what a brazen courtesan
would prefer to keep hidden, blushed a deep crimson and
closed her eyes, as you may well understand.

99 She would have covered her face, but her hands were tied,
and he could see her weep and understood
her shame. Then, after a moment the poor girl tried
to explain to him what had happened to her and would
have managed a phrase or two, but from the wide
ocean there came a terrible noise she could
not shout above—from the monster that now broke
the surface and bellowed loudly while she spoke.

100 Think of a huge vessel driven shoreward
by the wind and the waves as it tries to come into port.
So did this huge and terrible creature move forward,
eager for its meal, or call it a short

but tasty snack. (I admit, that is a poor word.)
The girl is half-dead with terror to be an ort
for this terrible ravening thing. She is in shock,
hanging there cruelly tied that way to a rock.

101 Ruggiero, however, has his lance at the ready,
and with it he strikes the orc, a writhing mass
that is more a blob than a beast, except for the head he
is aiming at. Its mouth is a dark crevasse
with protruding teeth like a boar's. Ruggiero's steady
lance strikes at the forehead but he has
little success. It's as if he is striking blows
on granite or iron. It's perfectly otiose.

102 He comes back for a second pass, and a third.
The orc is not hurt but begins to be annoyed
and it flees the shadow of what it takes for a bird
of enormous size. And as it is thus employed,
it leaves the girl on the beach it would have preferred
to be feasting on to do what it can to avoid
this nuisance that has come as ants will do
when we're trying to have a picnic. (Isn't it true!)

103 Let us imagine an eagle riding the air
and spotting a serpent making its way through the grass,
or, better, sunning itself on a large rock where
it can beautify its golden scales and pass
the time agreeably. The eagle sees it there,
but does not want to attack the head that has
the venomous fangs. She goes for the opposite end
where it's helpless and unable to defend

104 itself. Just so, Ruggiero, with sword and lance
makes pass after pass, ignoring the hard head
but poking now at the back or taking a chance
at stabbing it near the ears, or trying instead

to come at it from behind and attack the expanse of its huge hindquarters. But his high-spirited assaults get nowhere. The orc appears to be invulnerable. It is a catastrophe.

105 While they are thus engaged, let us propose another metaphor: a sleeping hound with one of those bothersome green horse-flies that goes on buzzing and dive-bombing disturbing his sound sleep on a summer day. The insect knows to go for the eyes and the tender ears or around the tail, and this goes on for a while, but the snap of the hound's jaw gets it and then he returns to his nap.

106 But back to the battle! The orc is now roiling the sea and churning it up, making it splash so high that the hippogryph gets drenched. Can he swim? Is he able to fly when his wings are wet? These wry questions present themselves to Ruggiero (and me). There isn't a lot on record to go on, and I imagine Ruggiero as starting to worry now and quickly he makes a new plan for himself as to how

107 to deal with this monster. You remember his magic shield—and he now remembers it too. The time is ripe to use it against this gynophagic creature. He goes back to where the sublime Angelica still hangs on that rock, a tragic figure. But he gives her the ring now. I'm sure you recall: Bradamante took it away from Brunello and then by Melissa, one fine day,

108 sent it to Ruggiero to save him from Alcina's clutches. (You must remember the ring!) It's magic and does a lot of great tricks—you become invisible, for example, or it can bring

protection from other kinds of spells. In sum,
it is at times an extremely handy thing.
To protect Angelica, kind Ruggiero places
it on her dainty finger before he chases

109 back to the orc, now that her eyes are protected
from the unbearable glare that it can emit.
The behemoth comes toward the beach, as the knight expected,
and its body blocks out a swath of horizon as it
gets closer and closer, and then, as the light is projected
from the shield's surface, it seems that the sun has split
and that now there are two competing up in the skies.
The harsh light strikes the huge beast in the eyes

110 and is utterly blinding. It writhes in the sea, and the hero
can poke it now in the belly, but hard scales there
protect its abdomen too. Still Ruggiero
keeps at it, stabbing, and thrusting anywhere
he can, but to no avail. And he can hear: "O
sir, leave it alone, now. Hear my prayer
and, while it is harmless, cut me loose and save
me so its stomach is not my sordid grave!"

111 It is, in fact, a reasonable notion,
and he turns back to shore and cuts her cruel ties.
He leads her to his mount and in one motion
lifts her up to the crupper. Into the skies
they ascend and they can both look down at the ocean
in which, because of its unbelievable size
they can make out the moving shape of the back
of the monster that would have made of her a snack.

112 Ruggiero is pleased with himself and twists around
again and again to look at her, for she
cannot move. (It's a long way down to the ground.)
And she's no less attractive now that she's free.

She's gorgeous, in fact. He can feel his heart pound
in his breast and imagines the sweet kisses that he
will give her (and more than that) as soon as they land.
To go to visit Spain is what he had planned,

- 113 but to hell with that. He'll take something closer. Say
Brittany, which they're approaching, where it sticks out
between the channel, I think, and the Bay of Biscay.
Near the beach is an oak grove and flying about
are nightingales. It's protected and out of the way,
with a sweet water spring in a meadow and, no doubt,
other attractions, but these are not his concerns.
He dismounts at once and immediately turns
- 114 to her, whom he would now like to mount. But first
there's all this armor, with ties, and buckles, and straps,
this way and that. And his fingers do the worst
job of unfastening these. (It's like the wraps
on presents we had as children.) He would have cursed,
but she's right there, and such a chivalric lapse
would not be good, especially now. He tries
all the harder working away at the ties,
- 115 but making no progress at all. But this canto is long
enough, don't you think? And this is as good a place
as any to take a break. One would not with the song
want to impose too much on readers, in case
they fail to continue. I'll stop while your interest is strong.
In Canto Eleven, I shall continue apace.
(Your translator, you'll be relieved, now disencumbers
himself of those rhymes on Italian ordinal numbers.)

Canto Undecimo

- 1 At the slightest flick of the reins, your well-trained horse will turn or stop in his tracks. But it is rare that reason can exercise control over coarse and unruly forces of lust. The pleasure is there waiting to be taken even by force and harder to constrain than a hungry bear when it has discovered some honey and its whole being is intent upon this goal.
- 2 I am not making light of this. It's sad, but there is good Ruggiero (yes, he is!) with Angelica, naked, alone with him, and mad desire drives out Bradamante from his memory. For the moment, he is glad to have beside him, grateful, helpless, this irresistible piece of goods, this dear girl who is available and . . . here!
- 3 Not even Xenocrates, Plato's student, famed for his rectitude and self control could, in this situation, have shown himself prudent and influenced less by the body than by the soul. Ruggiero is tearing his clothes off in a pudent frenzy, but, repelled as she is by this whole exercise, she looks down and sees the ring on her finger. Aha! It is the very thing!
- 4 Brunello took it from her at Albracca. This is the same ring she carried long ago with her into France with her brother—his was the lance that later came to Astolfo. (Oh!)

When Malagigi cast his spell, this is
the ring she used at Merlin's tomb so no
charm could work against her. And it had been a
help undoing the spells of Dragontina.

- 5 This was the ring she used to escape from the tower
the wicked old man had shut her up in (you read
of this in *Orlando Innamorato*, our
guide, Boiardo's poem). But enough said.
You've read the stories and you all remember how or
when she used it. Brunello pirated
it away from her in order to give it to
Agramant . . . But all of this you knew.
- 6 The point is that she knows what it is, and, yes,
she sees it on her finger. What a stroke
of excellent luck for a woman in distress.
She pops it into her pretty mouth and a cloak
of invisibility covers her like a dress.
Or say she is like the sun when a cloud or smoke
conceals it and it suddenly goes away
leaving us in darkness at mid-day.
- 7 It takes a moment or two before the poor
Ruggiero figures it out. Where is she? But then
he remembers the ring and what it can be used for,
and he feels like a total dope. He remembers when
he gave it to her. He shouldn't have done that, or
at least he should have taken it back again.
Is this how she shows her gratitude for all
he did? What he wants in return from her is a small
- 8 display of womanly kindness and affection.
She stole the ring! If only she'd asked, he would
have given it to her. Anger and utter dejection
combine in his heart, and the mixture does not feel good.

“Where are you?” he asks, and he runs in every direction
hugging the empty air as if that could
somehow produce the girl. He’s got no pants or
shirt, and from her I’m afraid he gets no answer.

9 And this annoys him, too. “I know that you
hear me, but you don’t answer! You are cruel!”
But he is wrong. Angelica withdrew
some time ago, not being an utter fool,
and, lest he think of some way to pursue
her, she has run quite far by now—and who’ll
be surprised to learn that she has found
a cave? A herdsman lives there, old but sound

10 of mind and limb. He keeps a herd of mares
that graze on the grasses of the valley floor.
There are stalls for the horses, by which the herdsman spares
them the heat of the day. In the interior,
Angelica rests for a while. Now that her prayers
seem to have been answered, she’s grateful for
a little food she finds, and some cloth as well
to put on her body, so that when the spell

11 of invisibility ends and she takes the ring
out of her mouth, she will be able to go
about in the world. The crude garments bring
decency if not style and they are no
substitutes for all those flattering
creations she had worn not long ago
and took for granted—and yet her beauty glows
all the more brightly in these modest clothes.

12 Never mind Virgil’s Phyllis or Neaera,
or Galatea, or Amaryllis. None
of these young ladies about whom we hear a
tale of how their shepherd swains were won

compared with our Angelica. I near a transition now. She picks a mare that can run and gallops away on the handsome and willing beast, thinking she might perhaps return to the East.

13 Ruggiero continues to hunt for her but after a while he realizes she has gone and he would be a fit subject now for raucous laughter if anyone else had been in the grove to see how stupid he'd been. (Pay heed with this witchcraft or you can really mess up.) He goes back to the tree where he's hitched the hippogryph. But it's not there. It has wriggled out of the bridle. It's up in the air

14 flying away. Woe upon woe! He has lost the woman, the horse, and also the ring. It's a bad day altogether. But it's the ring that he most regrets losing—it was a gift he'd had from Bradamante. Feeling as dumb as a post, he gets himself dressed again, but he's slow and he's sad, quite different from what he had been a short time ago. But life has its ups and its downs as most of us know.

15 Off he goes then, along the rolling hills and grassy slopes into a broad valley, trying not to brood about his ills, and wondering where to go. For instance, shall he take the well marked path or use his skills to explore new ground? But let's not dilly-dally. He takes the path and it soon leads into a dense wood—where he hears a hullabaloo.

16 Again boom/clank. The sounds of fighting. He has no idea who it is or what it's about and he hides himself behind a convenient tree from which he can in some safety look out

to see the pair—a giant seems to be
engaged with a knight in armor, who is no doubt
agile and keen, but obviously no match
for the giant he fights. It is not pleasant to watch.

17 There's lots of parry and thrust, and the knight has many
elegant moves, but the giant is huge and presses
the knight hard. Ruggiero notices when he
strikes his form is fine, but still he guesses
the giant will win in the end unless he makes any
dreadful mistake. This calculation distresses
Ruggiero who, if he could, would help in the cause
of the knight—but that is forbidden by chivalry's laws.

18 There's a dead horse on the path—the knight's, it appears.
And the giant fights with a huge club that has no
style to recommend it. Ruggiero fears
that the end has come when the giant strikes a blow
on top of the other's helmet that he hears
resounding in the forest. The knight is laid low
and the giant rips the helmet off to deliver
a final blow. Ruggiero, with a shiver,

19 recognizes the face. And oh, dear lord!
It's Bradamante, his love. What can he do
but come out from behind the tree with his sword
drawn and ready to challenge this monster who
is about to kill his darling? But his word
of challenge and defiance Ruggiero shouts to
the giant goes ignored, entirely. He
throws her over his shoulder like some wee

20 lamb that a wolf is carrying off from the pen,
or dove that an eagle has in its talons. What
can Ruggiero do but pursue and shout again?
The giant however takes such huge strides that

Ruggiero cannot keep up (nor could many men).
He has them still in sight as he follows, but
he is steadily falling farther behind and he
has a dismal fear of what the outcome will be.

- 21 The dark path emerges into the light
of a broad meadow. The giant is far ahead . . .
But let us leave them there for a while. We might
return to Orlando and follow him instead.
He's beaten King Cimosco in their fight
and taken his terrible cannon, which he has fed
into the sea's maw for the sake of all men,
in the fervent hope it will never be used again.
- 22 Had it been up to Orlando we would all
be much better off. But the cannon's cruel inventor
was the one who tempted Eve and contrived the fall
of mankind from the garden, the arch tormentor,
whose clear intention was that what we call
guns and cannons would one day re-enter
the world of men, in our grandparents' time or before
and would transform both society and war.
- 23 A hundred fathoms down it was, but some
necromancer raised it from the deep
and gave it to the Germans who learned from
repeated trial and error how to keep
from blowing themselves up. The curriculum
of the devil suited them well and with a steep
learning curve they rediscovered its use.
But secrets tend to spread and reproduce.
- 24 Soon Italy and France and other nations
had learned the wicked art of how to pour
molten bronze into molds and the preparations
for making bombards, cannons, hackbuts, or

petards for various martial situations.
And all was changed from what had gone before,
for there was no skill with sword or lance that could
against such a weapon do anyone any good.

25 They shatter iron and smash marble, and no
armor can protect against them. You may
as well turn your swords into ploughshares or keep them for show,
now that their usefulness has had its day.
And what this means is that anyone, high or low,
is the equal of anyone else. It has done away
with rank and order, and honor, and valor, too,
and the rabble are just the same as me and you.

26 The bad are on an equal footing with the good,
and the raw recruit is a match in skill to the best
of the *maîtres d'armes*. All those things that you'd
expect to be rewarded in a test
of chivalry are fallen in desuetude.
Many brave lords and knights will find their rest
in the wholesale carnage of this new era in fighting,
so bloody and disgusting, but not exciting.

27 Consider, if you will, this present war
and what it has meant to Italy and the entire
world. Our battlefields are lakes of gore
because of this machine of metal and fire
that the devil was the inspiration for.
Let its inventor rot in hell. For his dire
sins, let him be thrown in the deepest abyss
next to where the accursed Judas is

28 for having caused the decline of what we agree
was a rare and glorious moment of civilization.
What is likely to follow, whatever it be,
will be less attractive and poorer, and every nation

will remember with longing a time in history
that will not come again. But our narration
was following Orlando on his way
to Ebuda, where they feed to the orcs each day

- 29 a beautiful woman. The faster he tried to go,
the less helpful the wind, from whatever direction
light or even non-existent, and no
tack they tried made progress. In his dejection,
he decided it was the will of God. (If so,
I shall soon explain and make the connection
with Hibernia's king.) But Orlando, even if
this were the case, decided to take a skiff,
- 30 leave the ship, and try it alone. He could
get to that rocky isle sailing or rowing.
He took with him an anchor and some good
cable, which were part of his plan for going
up against the orc. He also took food
and water, and of course his sharp sword, knowing
or guessing at least how he might overcome
the monster that Ebuda was suffering from.
- 31 He sets off for the island pulling the oars
to his large chest again and again. He makes
small whirlpools at each stroke with his great force.
His back is toward the bow, and at times he takes
a look behind so that he can correct his course.
It is the time of day when Aurora wakes
and her yellow locks scatter the early light
of the sun (which Tithonus never thinks is right).
- 32 Slow but steady, he approaches the rocky coast
and is within a stone's throw when he hears—
or thinks he hears—a sound of weeping, the ghost
of weeping (it is so faint). Can he trust his ears?

He turns around to his left and is almost
facing the shore when the source of it appears:
a naked woman tied to a tree where her toes
are bathed now and then by the surf as it ebbs and flows.

33 She is still some distance away and, as you'd suppose,
her head is facing downward so he does not
see who she is—but that makes no difference, Lord knows.
He pulls on the oars harder and faster in what
resembles a frenzy. How did she lose her clothes?
And who is she? He is eager for answers, but
before he reaches close enough to call out
the sea heaves with many a waterspout,

34 waves crash on the shore and echo in caves
with ominous rumbling noises, and then it appears—
the orc, that is. It is feeding time, and it craves
succulent maidenly flesh. The animal rears
up in menace, and even the sea behaves
in a vile, bloodthirsty fashion as it nears
the shore. The sky grows dark. It begins to rain.
One would think the firmament had gone insane.

35 And as if to match the fierceness of the storm,
the orc rises up to meet it, also dark,
and also full of rage, as if each could inform
the other. It would be hard to imagine that stark
terror did not at once fill Orlando's warm
but vulnerable heart, but in his barque
his strong hand on the tiller is quite steady.
His face is grim with purpose. He is ready.

36 He has a plan already excogitated,
and he maneuvers between the orc and its prey,
protecting her from the anticipated
lunge from the beast by getting in the way.

He has the anchor in hand now, heavy, weighted,
and with sharp flukes for this kind of affray.
It isn't certain, of course, but he has a hunch
it may work as the monster approaches the maiden for lunch.

- 37 And approach it did. Seeing Orlando there
in the boat, it opened a mouth that gaped so wide
that a man on horseback could, with room to spare,
have entered in and galloped about inside.
Orlando, fearless, maneuvered his little yare
skiff into its cavernous maw as the tide
allowed him to do, and at the right moment flung
the sharp points of the anchor into its tongue.
- 38 It tried to close its mouth but the boat's mast
pierced its palate and the monster thus was caught
above and below. Just so a miner makes fast
the tunnel he's in, so that the ore may be brought
safely out and up. Orlando at last
can use that trusty sword with which he has fought
so many times before to stab and slash
inside the creature, making many a gash.
- 39 The monster, of course, is in pain and it thrashes about,
plunging deep and then rising, writhing, roiling
the sand at the bottom. The knight of France swims out
and in his hand is the anchor line, uncoiling
as he makes for the rocky shore, so taut and stout
that it draws the monster, hooked like a fish that is toiling
to free itself but cannot, because its pain
only gets worse each time it increases the strain.
- 40 Think of a wild bull lassoed by a rope
around its horns and how it struggles and leaps,
kneels and bucks and rears in its desperate hope
of freeing itself, but its exertion keeps

tightening its bonds. In its efforts to cope
with what was so unfamiliar in the deeps
that were its home, the orc, in its torment tried
to free itself from what had impaled it inside.

41 And, oh, the blood! Great quantities of it pour
out of its gullet to stain blue water red,
and such is the terrible quantity of gore
that the sea, if the name were available, could be said
to be the Red. It splashes on the shore,
and the waves churn high as if the ocean bled
and the roarings of the orc and the sea resound
and echo from the mountains all around.

42 How bad is it? I'll try to make it clear.
The commotion is such that Proteus from his cave
emerges and the confrontation here
is appalling enough so that what he wants is to save
himself. Although a god, he is full of fear,
and he flees, and so does Neptune (not so brave
as we had supposed), hitching his dolphins to
his chariot and hurtling through the blue

43 water to Ethiopia far away.
And Ino, too, with Melicerta in
her arms, and the Nereids and Tritons. They
all depart from the waters where they have been
accustomed to live and rule. And from that day
they are seen no more in the realms of scale and fin.
Orlando, meanwhile, is reeling in his prize,
that enormous fish, but as he does, it dies.

44 The islanders have been looking on, afraid
of what they see and what it may portend.
You'd think they would be pleased and would have made
a celebration to commemorate the end

of the dreadful monster. But no! What they displayed was fear of what the sea god might now send, angrier than ever, to impose worse punishments and even more grievous woes.

45 Better, they all agreed, to placate the god, make concessions, and keep him from being too angry at them. Thus they came up with the odd idea of killing Orlando, which would do much in the way of appeasement. As a wad of batting catches fire whenever you send a spark from a flint and steel, this passion blazed up and spread through the crowd in similar fashion.

46 Kill him! Tear him limb from limb and throw him into the sea! (As a token of their chagrin.) One takes a sling, another picks up a bow, some have swords or lances. And they are in high dudgeon (or as high as they get) as they go down to the beach to attack the paladin. Ungrateful churls! Rude ruffians! The scum of the earth! It is unbelievable that they come

47 against him thus. Why are they not all smiles? Why do they not bear gifts? Are they not glad to be rid of that monster? But as they approach in files and ranks, it is clear that something different had filled their hearts and minds. The men in these isles are strange indeed, he thinks, and quite possibly mad. Like ants that swarm down a hill, the Ebudans scurry, but Orlando, as he waits, doesn't seem to worry.

48 Have you ever been to Lithuania or to Russia during festival time? They lead a dancing bear down the streets, a wonder for the simple folks and the gentry as well. Indeed,

everyone comes to see—but the metaphor
is that of the yapping dogs. Does the bear give heed
to them? Or quake with fear, or even notice?
Thus it is with Orlando. The anecdote is

- 49 relevant because the paladin knows
that he can at any moment disperse the throng
quite easily with only a couple of blows.
He waits as they approach. And they are wrong
because he wears no armor to suppose
that he is defenseless and that they are strong
(if only in numbers). What they do not suspect
is that his skin is hardened and can protect
- 50 him as well as any armor could.
(You, of course, are aware of this having read
Boiardo's explanation in his good
poem. The skin is enchanted from his head
to his toes, as you have surely understood.)
But on they come and, at once, thirty are dead
who were in front and therefore the first to feel
the terrible bite of Durindana's steel.
- 51 They're not the smartest fellows but they are quick
to react to all those bodies heaped on the sand
either through some fabulous magic trick
or extraordinary strength. Either way the band
disperses at once. The beach that had been thick
with fighters now has become a deserted strand.
Orlando is able to turn his attention to
the woman whose cruel bonds he will undo.
- 52 But . . . There's always a *but* in these affairs.
He hears from another direction a new uproar.
Can Ebuda produce a second band that dares
challenge him? No, it turns out to be a war,

and the Irish, taking the islanders unawares,
have come to slaughter them, have waded ashore.
For revenge? For justice? Sport? In their great rage
they seem to have no respect for sex or age.

53 The islanders make little or no defense,
partly because they are taken by surprise
and partly because they are outnumbered. Hence,
their goods are sacked; their houses, before their eyes,
are set afire. They watch in impotence
as they burn to the ground. Then, further to chastise
the islanders, the Irish put them to death.
Not a one is left alive to draw a breath.

54 Orlando hears the shrieks and wails and grunts,
but none of this has anything to do
with him, or he with it. He turns at once
to the maiden, whom he thinks familiar. Who
could it be? As he gets closer and confronts
her, he recognizes Olympia, true
and faithful . . . And is this how she's rewarded,
in a punishment most execrable and sordid?

55 Poor, wretched girl! After the rude affront
that love had inflicted on her, Fortune too
piled on (as is her very sorry wont)
and pirates came to that island—as she knew
they might: they are always on the hunt—
and took her captive (which is what they do).
They sold her to Ebuda, where the price
because of their special need, was very nice.

56 She's naked as a jaybird, you'll recall,
and ashamed and therefore does not raise her head
or even have the nerve to speak at all
when he asks her how she got into this dread-

ful fix. Turning her face away, in a small
sad voice, she says, "I wish that I were dead.
I thank you for saving my life, but you have as well
protracted my sufferings in this living hell.

- 57 "It would have been horrid to be eaten by
that monster from the deep, and I am relieved
to have been spared. But having said that, I
should be grateful, now that I've been reprieved,
if you could dispatch me some cleaner way—for why
should I draw another breath? I was deceived
and nothing remains for me now but the chagrin
and humiliation of the plight I'm in."
- 58 She tells him how her husband left her alone
on that island where they were sleeping and how, then,
the pirates seized her. She maintains a steady tone
but writhes and turns as Diana is doing when
the painters show her with Actaeon looking on.
Her hands cover her bosom, her loins, again
her bosom, but whatever part of her she conceals,
there is another one that she reveals.
- 59 Orlando, aware of her discomfort, calls
to the boat and orders it into port so that he
can provide her with some cloth to put on as shawls
to save, or retrieve, her womanly modesty.
And while he is busy with this, it now befalls
that Oberto arrives, the Hibernians' king, to see
that the monster is really dead, as he had heard
in reports he'd feared were hopeful or absurd.
- 60 What the king has heard is that some intrepid knight
went swimming and somehow, in the monster's throat,
had cast an anchor which had caught there quite
fixedly and then, as if a boat

were there at the end of the hawser he held tight,
had dragged it ashore, where at last he smote
it dead. Is it true, he asks, while all around
the fires burn and the dead sprawl on the ground.

61 Orlando, as you would expect, is covered in gore—
soaking wet and filthy. Still, to the king,
he looks familiar, though hardly a sight for sore
eyes. But is it he who did this thing?
Who else could it be but Orlando? Who would be more
likely to have subdued this monster? Who'd bring
such a trophy onto the beach? "It's you!"
he says to the count, and adds, "How do you do?"

62 Many years before, at a tender age,
he had been sent across the sea to France
to the court to be of service as a page
and had met Orlando there. This circumstance
is the kind of thing the fates will sometimes stage.
(Or is it merely coincidence and chance?)
Recognizing his friend's familiar face,
he takes his helmet off and they embrace.

63 Orlando is no less delighted now to see
the king than Oberto is to see him. They
repeat their warm abbracci two or three
times and then Orlando explains the way
the unfortunate girl has been mistreated, how she
has been betrayed by Bireno who could repay
such goodness and love with utter faithlessness.
No woman in all the world could deserve it less.

64 He tells the king of what she had done to prove
in various ways—including the loss of her kin
and the sale of her property—her unswerving love.
She had even been willing to give her life for him in

an extravagant gesture of selflessness and of
devotion. Orlando had seen how she had been
all but angelic and certainly super-human.
Glistening tears well up in the eyes of the woman

65 at hearing her story. Her face is a springtime sky
when the rain falls at the same time as the sun
is shining. Or think of the nightingale's sad cry
from a green tree's lofty bough, so that anyone
hearing it is moved, and Love, nearby,
catches the tears that well up in her eye
and bathes his arrows' feathers in them and heats
the arrowheads in the heat of her heartbeats.

66 He tempers them in the chilly streams that pour
among the roses and lilies on their banks
and shoots at some youth whom neither armor nor
shield can protect, and he is smitten, thanks
to this assault in Cupid's gentle war.
(You think these are merely innocent boyish pranks?
Most grown men know better and they fear
what can ensue if they ever let Love come near.)

67 I ought to mention here that Olympia had
in her forehead, her eyes, her nose, her cheeks, her hair,
her shoulders, and throat such beauty as drives one mad.
And her breasts! Oh, there was such perfection there
that all other women would envy and be sad
that theirs were not like hers. Beyond compare!
Snowy white, like cheeses on display,
with that cleavage in between them . . . (Look away!

68 And yet we can't.) Let's say it's early spring
and in that little valley there is snow
still on the ground. In trees the small birds sing.
The air is gentle. And as you make your slow

progress, you think that heaven cannot bring
a finer prospect than what here below
is paradise enough. That valley seems
the locus of your finest and sweetest dreams.

69 And her rounded hips, and her belly, flat and pale,
spotless as a looking glass, and her white
thighs you'd see on a Phidias female
(a goddess, surely). And what was out of sight
I can only hint at. Beauty's Holy Grail?
But that falls short. I cannot get it right.
Had Paris in that Phrygian meadow seen
her with the other three, it would have been

70 impossible for Venus to have won
first prize in that pageant they had staged.
Paris, therefore, would never have begun
the Trojan war. No passion would have raged
in his heart for Helen, which means there would have been none
of that dreadful bloodshed. Instead, he would have gauged
her beauty differently, preferring bliss
with fair Olympia rather than with this

71 married woman. Or let us put her in
Croton, where Zeuxis made his tributary
painting for Juno's temple. It has been
said that he gathered nudes from everywhere he
could find them, taking parts from each to syn-
thesize the perfect woman. (But her very
flawlessness would have been sufficient: the rest
were quite unnecessary for his quest.)

72 To be perhaps less fanciful, I do not
suppose Bireno ever saw her nude.
Had he done so, I can't imagine what
could have made him desert her as he did, but you'd

expect Oberto to notice her, and that
was exactly what occurred. They were not lewd,
but let's say earthly thoughts make him console
the girl and tell her it would be his goal

73 to go with her to Holland to restore
her to her former state and to inflict
vengeance on that perjurer and make war
using all of Ireland's power. He'll act
as swiftly as he is able, but before
they begin this enterprise, they must face the fact
that her wardrobe needs refreshment. To find those
things she needs, he has men search for clothes

74 in the empty houses where plenty of gowns remained
behind after their wearers had been fed
to the orc. (This should not have to be explained.)
They found all styles and sizes in black or red
or green or gold—and still Oberto complained
that they were not good enough for her. He said
they were but paltry rags in which to dress
a woman as lovely as she. (Oh, heavens, yes!)

75 But let's be frank. The best of the Florentine
silk or cloth of gold would not have been
adequate for her. Not even the fine
embroidery of Minerva herself could begin
to satisfy him for something to drape on the shine
of her astonishing beauty. This left him in
a quandary from which he was relieved
by her gratitude for what she had received.

76 Orlando for his part was pleased to see
this burgeoning love: Bireno would not go
unpunished for his treachery, and he,
the paladin, would be able to leave with no

compunctions or entanglements, for we
remember it was not Olympia's woe
that brought him here but worry for his own
fair lady, who had been there but was gone.

77 But where? That was not easy to discover,
for everyone was dead and could not say
anything useful to the forlorn lover
who'd lost the trail and had no idea which way
she might have gone. So when the fleet sailed over
he went with them, because in Galway Bay
he was somewhat closer to France, where the war remained
one of his concerns, as I have explained.

78 He stayed in Ireland only a day, for he
was eager to press on. They begged and pleaded,
but he could not oblige. The stern decree
of Love commanded him forward, and this he heeded.
As for Olympia, he ensured that she
would be well cared for and have whatever she needed,
which King Oberto most sincerely swore.
She would have all that and even more.

79 Indeed, Oberto gathered men and made
a league with the kings of England and Scotland to go
to retake Holland and Frisia, where they stayed
long enough in their great numbers so
that the Zeelanders too rose up who had obeyed
Bireno but now enlisted with his foe.
At last Oberto captured him and he
was put to death, as he deserved to be.

80 Oberto took Olympia to wed
and she was no longer a countess but now a queen,
which is better, I think, but let us turn instead
to Orlando who is at sea where he has been

traveling night and day as the breezes have sped
him back to his port of embarkation. The keen
winds and bitter waves he fights no more. Oh,
how good it is to get back on Briogliadoro!

- 81 During that winter, he did many noble deeds
worthy to be recorded for all time—
but quietly, so that the facts a chronicler needs
to describe them at all correctly in prose or rhyme
are altogether lacking, these little seeds
from which the trees of reputation climb
to the sun and grow. Orlando walked the walk
and left it to lesser men to talk the talk.
- 82 How he spent that winter, nobody knows,
but then the sun moved into the house of the ram,
the beast that carried Phrixus away from those
angry farmers. (And yes, I confess, I am
pleased with these classy allusions, though I suppose
too many could be distracting from our program.)
At any rate, it is springtime, and pretty flowers
blossom, as do the tales of Orlando's powers.
- 83 He bears his burden of sorrow from mountaintop
to valley meadow, but then one day in a wood
he hears a wail. It is loud. It does not stop.
It crosses his mind that this may not be good,
and he spurs his horse. (Does he use a riding crop?)
But you are getting tired, perhaps? I should
let it go for the following canto when,
if you will permit me, we'll take up his story again.

Canto Duodecimo

- 1 When Ceres, returning from visiting Cybele,
had reached the lovely valley that lies in the shadow
of Aetna, she looked, as all the legends say,
for her daughter, Proserpina. All over the meadow
she hunted, more and more frantic, as you may
quite easily imagine—and very sad. Oh,
where can she be? She weeps and beats her breast
and wails, but I suppose you remember the rest:
- 2 how she takes the two pine trees, rips them entire
out of the earth, and thrusts them into the crater
so that they burst into blazing torches, a fire
that would never burn out and with them the worried mater
mounts her chariot, dragon-drawn. (I admire
such vehicles!) She flies over the greater
part of the upper world and, finding no
trace of her daughter, even goes below
- 3 to Tartarus' depths. You get the idea, I do
believe—that if Orlando's powers were equal
to hers as his desire was, he too
would have scoured heaven and earth in the lively sequel
Angelica deserved. And he could pursue
without the dragons, taking care to peek well
wherever he went, doing the best one can
if one is not an immortal but merely a man.
- 4 In France he has looked for her and now to Castile
he goes to search, and he will cross the sea
to Libya's wastes if he must, such is his zeal.
But he hears the sound of a voice that seems to be

lamenting and he wonders if it is real.
Then he sees a mounted knight and he
has a woman with him on the saddle calling
for help and weeping. It is quite appalling.

- 5 Whatever it is, this surely is a time
when Orlando might be useful, and it seems—
he cannot be at all sure of this, and I'm
unwilling to comment—that this is the girl of his dreams,
the beautiful Angelica, paradigm
of womanliness. But whoever she is, her screams
stir his heart. He challenges the knight,
defies him, and tries to get him to stop and fight.
- 6 The kidnapper or robber does not reply
but, intent on his lovely captive, runs away
as fast as the wind. (I cannot tell you why
the wind is the usual standard, but that's what they say.)
Orlando has no choice then but to try
to pursue the villain as he flees, and they
are racing: Brigliadoro is running well
as he chases the wicked knight and the demoiselle.
- 7 Hoof beats, screams, the blur of the trees going past,
and the horses' heavy breathing. It is the ideal
of chivalry. Orlando's heart beats fast
in exhilaration—a wonderful thing to feel.
He reaches the edge of the wood and comes out at last
in an empty meadow. They're gone. Ah, imbecile!
They must have gone in through the gleaming golden gate
of the castle that looms before him, proud and ornate.
- 8 Impressive, and therefore dangerous, its décor
is elegant but, to be candid, not inviting.
Convinced that the kidnapper entered just before
he arrived on the scene, Orlando follows, delighting

in the chance for combat. He has never been more eager (and he has seen a great deal of fighting). But there's no sign of the wicked knight or his horse. They've disappeared, and so has the girl of course.

- 9 He dismounts and rushes through the entrance hall, into the various suites and chambers, and even the porches that overlook the meadow. In all the nooks and crannies he peers, and the chests, and given the time this takes, his anger, which was not small to start with, grows ever greater. Merciful heaven! He pokes at the bedclothes, flaps the wall hangings (clever!) but he finds no trace of the knight or the lady whatever.
- 10 To have found Angelica and then almost at once to lose her this way is infuriating. He has been outwitted and thinks himself a dunce. She's here somewhere in the palace. She has to be. But nothing, nothing. Frustrated, he hunts, and he calls her name again and again, but she does not answer. He knows she is here. His mind tells him so, but, still, he does not find
- 11 his prize. Instead, he bumps into others who are here, complaining, running around in quest of various people. Ferrau, and Brandimart too, King Gradasso, and Sacripant, and the best of knighthood, and not one of them has a clue as to how to proceed in this uneven contest against the Invisible Lord who is master here, a thief and a villain who never deigns to appear.
- 12 This one's horse was taken, and that one's lady, or there are various other treasures he stole. They seek him everywhere but are afraid he is laughing at them all from some hidey-hole.

Meanwhile they are trapped here as if some *cadi* had sentenced them so that somehow the role of thief and victim had been reversed. They are caught and kept here by those things they've lost and sought.

- 13 Having been through the palace five or six times, Orlando said to himself he could be wasting his time. Was this one of the tricks of the knight, to have gone back into the wood using another exit? Orlando picks this possibility and takes a good look at the meadow, staring down at the ground for any fresh tracks by which the knight could be found.
- 14 He's frantic of course, and the work is painstaking and tough, but he can't think of a better idea, and he tries to pay attention, peering down at the duff when he hears a call from the palace. He raises his eyes and . . . Yes, it's Angelica's voice! It's sweet enough to make his tears well up. What a fine surprise! He looks back at the palace to try to trace the source of it and glimpse that lovely face.
- 15 He hears her clearly enough, she's calling for "Help, help! Not just to keep me alive but for my virgin's honor, which is more precious to me. Shall this thief connive to take it from me? Help! I do implore your utmost efforts valiantly to strive to save me, or else to kill me—which would keep me pure as I go to my eternal sleep."
- 16 His heart is light again as he returns to the palace and goes again through all the rooms with highest hopes. The love in his heart burns along with the fury there. Of course, he assumes

she must be somewhere close, but he discerns nothing, no one. What the count presumes is that she's looking for him and moving about. He hears the voice again. Then it fades out.

17 Meanwhile, Ruggiero, the last time we talked of him, was following after some giant with a captive woman. He followed him out of a wood only to come upon this very palace. (Ah, you see it all connects!) The giant (fee, fo, fum!) enters the palace, perhaps with sardonic laughter, and with Ruggiero following just after.

18 But once he crosses the palace threshold, there is no sight of the giant, or lady, or horse, and if Ruggiero searches everywhere he finds no one, nothing whatever. Of course, he looks again, feeling the rage and despair Orlando felt. (It couldn't have been worse.) He too goes outside. (It's a long-odds choice.) And he too hears from the palace a plaintive voice.

19 He runs back to the palace, just as had Orlando, and the others too. To tell the truth, that gentle voice in the air, so sad, to these men was able to mimic well Angelica, Bradamante, or a scad of other damosels so as to compel whichever knight might hear it to return to the palace. (It is a distressing thing to learn.)

20 A siren song devised by the wicked host, it called out to each gallant knight in the voice of her whom he admired and loved the most of all the women on earth, so that the choice

each of them made, quite reckless of the cost,
was to go back to the palace and rejoice,
each thinking he had found her. But not so!
It's another enchantment of Atlas, don't you know?

- 21 It's an intricate scheme he has dreamed up—to hold
all the brave men of France locked away in this
palace, to protect Ruggiero. I have told
how he reared Ruggiero and still is
looking out for him, afraid of the old
prophecy of his death. And after his
castle of steel and after Alcina, this new
stratagem is the best that he can do.
- 22 If all the heroes of France are locked up here
none of them can possibly do harm
to Ruggiero, whose life is very dear
to Atlas of Carena. Thus the charm
of the castle, which is anything but drear:
it offers every luxury that farm
or workshop can provide, for who would grouch
while nibbling sweetmeats on a silken couch?
- 23 But let us change the scene, and, if you will
allow, return to Angelica. With the ring?
She's found a horse and, having eaten her fill,
plans to return to India—and would bring
Orlando with her or Sacripant. She still
rejects them as suitors but as she is traveling
through so many cities and towns over the wide
expanse of the earth, she'd welcome a masculine guide.
- 24 It's safer that way, and she has already had lots
of adventures, most of which she would have let go.
To have a protector, then, is in her thoughts.
Either will do—and she looks high and low

but finds not a trace in all the likely spots.
She thinks of going alone, but then thinks, no
it's not a good plan. And then luck leads her to
that castle in which the whole chivalric crew

25 are hidden away, immured. She goes inside,
but because of the ring in her mouth Atlas can't see
her, although her vision is fine, and I'd
imagine she wouldn't have searched too strenuously
before she'd found Orlando and close beside
the count there was King Sacripant. And she
figures out in an instant how Atlas feigned
her voice and image (as I have already explained).

26 But which one does she want? It is a nice
question, really. Orlando is the stronger
and might be a better protector, but the price
might be too high, for if he comes along or
acts as her guide, that might not suffice.
The guide could presume. He might not try to wrong her,
but having been picked as guide, he could turn into master,
and to try to dismiss him then might provoke disaster.

27 It's an enviable choice to have to make
as a few fortunate women have sometimes learned,
but it isn't easy, and which is the mistake?
When you look back upon how things have turned
out and are able to see through the opaque
tissue of time, then you will have discerned
how roads diverge and how you picked the one
but wonder still what the other might have done.

28 Sacripant, the Circassian king, she believes
will not be such a problem later on
when she wants to ditch him. And even if she deceives,
she still will make him happy—until she's gone.

But that's how it has always been since Eve's
first prevarication. And so, anon,
she takes the ring out of her mouth to reveal
to Sacripant that she is here, and real.

- 29 But what she doesn't realize is that behind her
Orlando and Ferrau have just come in
and for both of them as well the magic blinder
has been removed. And both of them had been
looking for her and had been unable to find her.
Suddenly there she is. A pleasant grin
blossoms on their faces, for Atlas' vain
plan is undone, and they can see her plain.
- 30 There they are, the three of them, all in armor
with breastplates and helmets, or two of them anyway.
They had not been in fear of any harm or
physical danger, but it was a habit they
had acquired to wear this stuff (perhaps for the charm or
look of it). It was only Ferrau's array
that lacked the helmet, because the man had sworn
to wear only the one Almont had worn.
- 31 Almont? Troiano's brother. Orlando took
it from him in a battle. It had once
belonged to Argalia, Angelica's brother. (Look
it up, if you want.) These long-ago affronts
still rankle and they cannot be forsook.
Ferrau, therefore, is relentless as he hunts
for Orlando—who is there beside him, but
he might as well have had his eyes tight shut
- 32 such was the enchantment. Neither could see
the other, but Angelica? They could
watch her mount her horse. With celerity
she ran off with Sacripant. (It is not good

to have three lovers in a room, as we can easily understand, although she could have liked them one at a time.) The other two get on their horses and both of them pursue. . . .

- 33 Horses? I know, I ought to have said before that they kept their horses ready at the gate always saddled. Sometimes in battles or tight scrapes like this it's awkward to have to wait for a groom. And the word "chivalry" signifies more or less "horses and horsemanship." Such great knights were competent, I think you'll grant—Ferraù, Orlando, and also Sacripant.
- 34 Anyway, they are all galloping fast, and Angelica pops the ring back under her tongue and again is invisible. Oh, damn and blast! They cannot see her any more, and among the three of them there's chagrin. They are aghast! Especially Sacripant who ought to have clung more tightly to her. But would that have done much good? (These magic rings are not well understood.)
- 35 Angelica has reconsidered her scheme and thinks that maybe she's better off alone. She's got the ring, after all. And it must seem tiresome to deal with either one all the way to Galafron's kingdom, the scene of her happy childhood. So what she has done is gracefully to excuse herself from both and leave the pair behind her, equally wroth.
- 36 She does not canter off, or not right away. It's more amusing, she realizes, to see them running around, so she decides to stay at least for a while. Like the blind mice, the three

knights scurry in useless circles as they
attempt to find some trace of where she might be.
They're hounds that have lost the scent of a rabbit which
has gone to ground in a bush perhaps or a ditch.

- 37 There is, nevertheless, only the one
road, and they follow it, reasoning that she
must have gone this way. She might have done,
but who can guess where on it she could be?
Ahead? Behind? Orlando, at a run,
speeds ahead. And Ferrau? So does he.
Sacripant is third. But behind them, slow
and steady, is Angelica (ho! ho! ho!).
- 38 Eventually they reach a fork in the road
with many tines, any of which she could
have taken. Nothing on these pathways showed
evidence of hoof prints or more crude
but more reliable horseshit. The knights slowed
and stopped to debate the question, although you'd
have been impressed much less by their sincerity
than their displays of distrust and asperity.
- 39 Ferrau, the Spaniard, is not from Aragon, but
is king of arrogance, so to speak, and he
turns an angry face to the others to shout
imprecations at them, feeling free
to challenge them both. "What are you two about?
Where do you think you're going? You're bothering me.
I need no help or company following her.
Go find some other path, unless you prefer
- 40 "to die right here." Orlando then addresses
Sacripant, the Circassian, and says,
"Who the hell is he? I guess he guesses
that we are cowards or whores to whom he has

the right to be insulting. His brutishness is absurd and not to be endured.” And as soon as he’s said this he turns to Ferrau to challenge him, or at least to let him know

41 that he would have issued one if he’d been wearing a goddamned helmet. In which case he’d have made the villain understand what he had been daring to say to his betters and, with his trusty blade, correct his manners, which were in need of repairing. Ferrau, however, was not at all afraid and replied in an instant, telling Orlando that he could take him on, even without a hat.

42 And not just Orlando but both of them together. He voids his rheum in the other fellows’ faces, and all those conventional insults they use whether to amuse themselves or us (but then my place is not to pass judgment). Orlando says he would rather that Sacripant lend Ferrau his helmet. The case has gone too far for apologies and so it comes to a fight between himself and Ferrau.

43 “If I wanted a helmet,” Ferrau replies, “I would have taken both of yours by force. I don’t wear one because of a vow. I wait for that good helmet Orlando has on his head—but won’t for very long now.” Orlando understood and smiled and answered him, “You knave, you can’t be serious. Bare-headed, you will do to me what I did back at Aspramont to

44 “Almont, the son of Agolant? You’re mad! You come against me and I will take the rest of your armor, so that you will wish you had never started this business. Do your best!

I defy you!" "Upstart! Villain! Cad!"
Ferraù replies, "How often have I pressed
you so that I could have taken your armor from
you many times, you worthless piece of scum?"

- 45 "Lying Marano! When were you stronger than I,
or where, except in your dreams and the tales you tell
when I'm not around? But here I am! Now try
to make good your empty boasts. Can you do as well
in the real world?" Such is his reply,
and he hangs the helmet up on a branch to compel
a fair fight. "I want no advantage to blur
my victory over you, you contemptible cur."
- 46 He draws Durindana. Ferraù draws his sword too
and assumes a position with his shield over his head
so that the lack of a helmet does not do
much to disadvantage him. Instead,
on equal footing their horses circle, and who
will strike the first blow, not perhaps to draw red
blood but only to test the other's mail
to find where the joints are weak and one might impale
- 47 or penetrate with hurtful effect? Where
in the world could one find any two more skillful
knights, equally matched in strength, who would dare
one another's weapons? Proud and willful,
both are charmed and in any such affair
impossible to wound. But they are still full
of anger and ready to try to find the small
weak spot the other has and risk his all
- 48 in doing so. Ferraù, as I think you know,
is vulnerable but only at the navel,
and there he has thick armor arranged so
as to protect that place and he can brave all

battles without worry about a foe.
To the rest of his body a powerful charm gave all
protection. But if you know this, Orlando too
is aware of it and of what he has to do.

49 And the prince of Aglant? He is enchanted as well
except on the soles of his feet (wouldn't you know?).
But he never goes barefoot and is careful as hell
to be well shod. In the rest of their bodies is no
place where they can be cut because of the spell
that each of them is under. The armor though?
It's more for ornament than any need,
their skins being hard enough never to bleed.

50 So they go at it, and it's quite a show, with one
slashing away and the other poking back,
and neither misses, but when all's said and done,
neither does much damage either, hack
and hew and chop as they may. (But, son of a gun,
Orlando has inflicted a lucky thwack
that has opened a huge gash in Ferrau's plate
and it looks as if it may disintegrate.)

51 It isn't all that much of a fight, but it looks
fearsome indeed, and the only one to see
what's happening isn't exactly on tenterhooks.
Angelica, an invisible referee,
watches the bout—a spectacle for the books.
Meanwhile, Sacripant, supposing that she
has gone ahead, and seeing the two of them fight,
has hurried his horse on—which is quite all right.

52 Angelica, then, is alone and she looks on,
rather enjoying herself, but worrying some
because the charms that they are depending upon
may not, after all, be perfect. And the blows come

thick and fast and they resonate like a gong
some lunatic strikes. Her attention wanders from
the fight to the helmet hanging there in the tree.
If she took it, she wonders, would either of them see?

- 53 She isn't being wicked; it's just a silly
goof, and her intention all along
is to give it back to Orlando. But until he
notices that the precious helmet is gone,
the fight will be over nothing. (But will they be
able to stop? Or will they just go on
poking and banging at one another, fighting
only because they both find it exciting?)
- 54 She wanders away, and sooner or later Ferrau
notices that the helmet is gone. What
the hell? Who took it? As far as they both know
the only other person around was that
Circassian, Sacripant. So both of them go
after him, Orlando first, and not
far behind, Ferrau, both ready to bludgeon
that wicked fellow (for both are in high dudgeon).
- 55 They ride like the wind, following the course
of Sacripant's and Angelica's horses, which run
together a while but then it seems one horse
turned off to the right, but clearly the other one
went left. What to do? One follows the sinistrorse
track of Sacripant. Not to be outdone,
Ferrau, instead of cantering into the vale,
takes the other, upward—Angelica's trail.
- 56 And she? She had come upon a pleasant and shady
grove with a spring that invited her to rest
a bit, refresh herself, as any lady
has a right to do, and let her horse digest

the luscious grass. She is not afraid he
or they will find her here. She has the best
protection a girl could ever want, the ring.
She doesn't have to worry about a thing.

- 57 She ties her mare to a tree where it can graze
and hangs the helmet on a branch while she
goes to the spring to drink. She plans to laze
about on the cool grass and indolently
enjoy the *mise en scène* (can I use that phrase?).
But then Ferraù arrives and rapidly
she pops the ring in her mouth, jumps on her horse,
and hurries away—forgetting the helmet, of course.
- 58 Or, no, she hasn't forgotten it, but it was too
far away for her to have grabbed and now
she can't go back as one might think she'd do.
Ferraù has seen her, and you can imagine how
delighted he was. And then, in a moment, you
can guess how he felt when she disappeared. On the bough
he sees, however, the helmet she left behind
and his mood is much improved by this lucky find.
- 59 There isn't any question at all of what
it is. There is writing that clearly identifies
its owner and how and when it was that he got
this helmet Ferraù puts on. We realize
that he is still upset that Angelica's not
around. He goes to look for her. He tries
diligently but finding not a clue,
he gives it up, as anyone would do,
- 60 and goes back now to rejoin the Spanish force
outside of Paris. Angelica, he hopes,
will reappear sometime. His great remorse
at losing her is tempered, as he lopes

along with the helmet on his head, and, of course, the sweet thought of Orlando's fury. He mopes? He rages? Is stricken with shame? Any one of these is an entertaining prospect and all of them please.

- 61 Orlando, as you can imagine, followed Ferrau for a very long time, trying to win back that helmet. He knew that Sacripant had no part in its disappearance, and its lack troubled him most deeply. But although Orlando continued his efforts and kept track of where he might be, Ferrau kept it on his head until at last Orlando struck him dead
- 62 between two bridges. (But that's another story.) Angelica, meanwhile, is on her way but thinking about what happened and feeling sorry. It was only a little joke (though you may say it hadn't been well thought out). Her conciliatory motives had been fine, but with dismay she realized that she had behaved most badly and, could she have taken it back, would have done so gladly.
- 63 The kindnesses he had done her she had repaid with an injury she much regretted. But what could she do but lie in the bed she had made and hope to make up for it sometime later? What is done is done. (Nevertheless, it weighed heavily on her conscience.) At a trot she continued on her way for quite a while, dejected but determined, mile after mile.
- 64 But then (and there's always one of these to keep the writer occupied and the reader intent, or at the least able to ward off sleep), she came across a scene in a wood that meant

something had happened there—a man with a deep wound in his chest and, from the same event, there were two young men dead. What could this be? We have other subjects to cover, but then we'll see.

- 65 Before we deal with Angelica and before we get back to Ferrau (who deserves our mention) or Sacripant (of whom I shall have more to say later), we now turn our attention to the Prince of Anglant, to give him his title (or Orlando, lest there be any misapprehension). Let us speak of him in vivid depictions of all his efforts, troubles, and afflictions.
- 66 In the first city he comes to (it doesn't matter which particular city for any would do) he goes to a shop to get another hat, or helmet actually. He needs a new article of headgear for foes to batter. He doesn't even bother to test its true temper, because he will wear it mostly for show. (He's invulnerable, as we already know.)
- 67 He's equipped again and on his way. The time is that when Phoebus' car ascends the sky and his horses' coats are covered with dew as they climb out of the sea, and Aurora, never shy, scatters red and yellow flowers, sublime, all over the world. The stars have gone bye-bye, and in their beds have tucked themselves up tight to rest all day and then wake up at night.
- 68 In other words, as those who are more inclined to prose might say, it's early morning. And here our hero approaches Paris where he will find a chance to prove his valor and make clear

that his reputation is earned among mankind.
Approaching the city and getting very near
is a Saracen, Manilardo, the king of fair
Norizia (it's in Africa somewhere).

69 Along with him is the king of Tremisen, who
is considered by all to be a perfect knight.
(Tremisen, I believe, is in Africa too.)
The name of this king is Alzirdo. (Yes, that's right.)
They and their pagan armies had settled into
their winter quarters, because in King Agramant's fight
his attempts to take Paris hadn't succeeded. Therefore
he'd decided to try a siege that might end the war.

70 For this he had assembled a very great
number of soldiers. One might call it a host.
From Spain in the charge of his subordinate,
King Marsilio, many had come. And most
of France was allied with him, for from the gate
of Paris all the way to Arles, he could boast
of having conquered all but a very few
castles that still had held out, as they sometimes do.

71 They had been, as I say, in camp all winter, but now
the ice in the streams was breaking up and the grass
was turning green in the meadows, and on the bough
of a tree you could see the buds appearing. It was,
in other words, springtime, the time to plow
but also to wield swords. This entire mass
of soldiers Agramant now assembled to
display their martial might in a fine review.

72 It was for this muster that Manilardo and
Alzirdo had been marching with the many
squadrons each had under his command.
Orlando chanced to encounter them, and when he

did, Alzirdo recognized a grand
warrior, better than most, as good as any.
A very god of war, whose excellence
he took as a challenge. No, it makes no sense,

73 but there are people like that. They are vain,
think much of themselves, and find cause to resent
the prowess of others. It's difficult to explain
but Orlando's noble bearing somehow meant
that Alzirdo had to prove himself (again).
A challenge then. They'd have a tournament,
or at least a passage at jousting. He'd take his chance
against the prince of Aglant with his lance.

74 Not a good idea. At the first pass
Orlando's lance pierces through the chest
of the other and skewers his heart. He falls on the grass
dead. And his horse, now riderless and distressed,
runs away, while from the corpse, alas,
comes a gush of blood. The soldiers are impressed
but not in a good way. The raging throng
approaches the count, intending to right the wrong

75 they believe he has done, cutting, thrusting, and shooting
a storm of arrows at him. It's very busy
as when a wolf comes down to the valley, looting
bleating sheep or squealing pigs. Or is he
more like a bear that arouses the shepherds' bruiting?
They swarm around him. They're in a perfect tizzy,
and shouting, "Kill him! Kill him! Tear him limb
from limb." They are not friendly at all toward him.

76 Lances, arrows, sword, and a mace or two
assail him, banging upon his breastplate and
his shield from the front and the side. The angry crew
swarms around him and in every hand

is a lethal weapon. And what does Orlando do?
He wields Durindana and lets it have a *grande*
bouffe of blood. There are corpses all around
in piles two and three deep that litter the ground.

77 No armor, nor any garment of quilted cloth,
no matter how thick or how many times bound
around the head could protect these soldiers. Both
to left and right, he smites them, inflicting a wound
of lethal effect as he cuts a bloody swath
through their astonished ranks with a squishy sound.
Heads are lopped off, and arms, and they fly in the air
as if Death himself had come to visit there.

78 Or if he had, he'd have said that this display
was deeply satisfying and that the need
for his sickle was not evident today,
as the music of groans from men that die and bleed
filled the air, provoking from that gray
and ashen figure a smile that is rare indeed.
Durindana's performance of its task
was all that this dismal personification could ask.

79 The crowd has come on him all at once, but they
begin to separate, two or three at a time,
seeing that they are losing and in dismay.
(How can this be happening?) They climb
over the corpses, eager to get away
on foot or on horseback, covered in gore and grime.
Now suppose Valor makes an appearance and shows
their faces in his mirror: every one of them knows

80 not to look for what it will reveal.
But there is one old man whose blood has dried
but not his courage, which he can still feel
coursing through his veins as well as his pride.

The king of Norizia, full of martial zeal,
approaches Orlando—who does not stand aside
but waits for the blow of the lance against his shield
where it strikes and shatters. Does Manilardo yield?

81 He doesn't have the chance. For as he goes by
Orlando strikes him with the flat of his sword.
It isn't the edge, but one can verify
that it's enough. Manilardo is floored,
falling off the horse to the ground to die,
while Orlando continues his battle against the horde
of Saracens, a sparrow-hawk, if you please,
among a flock of twittering sparrows that flees

82 in all directions, beating their wings in fear.
He is mopping up the last of them, who were slow
in running away, cutting and slashing here,
and hacking and thrusting there in a guignol show
of a kind of swordsmanship that comes quite near
to butchery. And eventually there are no
living men left standing. Not a one.
He had a job to do and now it is done.

83 It is a vivid abattoir tableau.
Orlando now, having had his exercise
(he hadn't asked for any of this) can go
back to his quest, which is not a great surprise.
But which direction should he take? He has no
idea where Angelica's gone, and to analyze
the question is only to complicate the choosing.
Go left? Go right? It is hopelessly confusing.

84 He has the gloomy conviction that whichever way
he goes, she will surely have taken another,
so that he will be getting farther away each day
and losing ground. It is a dreadful bother.

The thing about these quests, if I may say,
is that they are also questions. One might rather
confront simple straightforward trials of strength
than rack his brain with thinking at any length.

- 85 He picks a direction and heads off through the fields
and forests, up hill and down dale, asking all
he meets what they can tell him—but this yields
nothing concrete or useful. His chances are small,
but better than if he were standing still. His shield's
weighing a ton, and he almost lets it fall.
But in the distance he sees a flickering light
near a cleft rock in the side of the mountain. Might
- 86 Angelica be there? He has no cause to suppose
that she is, but then no reason to think she's not.
When you're hunting rabbits in bushes you know that those
creatures are likely to hide. You check each spot,
every clump of thorns, every bush and rock. God knows
it's tedious, but a challenge. And the pot
will not be filled unless you persevere.
Thinking along these lines, Orlando draws near.
- 87 Is he thinking what we are thinking that these
caves are good, eerie holes in the earth
and full of narrative possibilities?
Does he know he's in a story? Is it worth
asking such questions? Hidden among the trees
there is the entrance, suggesting sex and birth
and, behind the thorns and brambles, in the center
of a pile of rocks, a place where one can enter.
- 88 It is, at any rate, a hiding place
which suggests to him that she might be inside.
By day, no one would ever find a trace
of the entrance, which only by night and with luck may be spied,

for the light from inside invites an observer to trace
its source in the hillside. When Briegliadoro is tied
to a tree, Orlando enters, if not on tiptoe
then at least as quietly as he can go.

- 89 There's a passageway with many winding steps
that are carved in the rock. It has taken a good deal
of labor with chisels to accomplish this. Perhaps
it is a kind of fortification? But he'll
find out soon enough. He moves and stops
and then continues, going partly by feel
but there is a faint glow that lets him see
his way as he explores. What can this be?
- 90 The passageway opens up at the bottom to show
a large cavern in which there burns a fire
and next to it a beautiful woman, or, no,
a girl, really, of maybe fifteen. The entire
place is transformed by her presence so that the glow
of the fire seems only a way to let one admire
the perfection of her face and form. From her eyes
there are tears from a grief she does not try to disguise.
- 91 What is he to make of this? Or we?
The beauty is well and good, but it can mean
something good or something bad. Could she be
a witch? A maid in distress? Something in between?
The tears recommend her, surely. We seldom see
a sorceress weeping. But perhaps she has a keen
intelligence and uses it to beguile
knights and readers. We shall learn in a while.
- 92 Orlando sees that there is an old woman too,
partly hidden in shadow. They are disputing
something or other—as women often do.
But as they realize someone is intruding,

they fall silent. Orlando greets them with few
but gentle words, and also executing
a courteous bow that gentlemen can perform.
Their greeting to him is welcoming and warm.

- 93 Clearly they were startled when he appeared—
an unknown man thus entering their cave.
But they recover nicely. (That he adhered
to the norms of courtesy has made them brave.)
Orlando asks who or what they feared
to have taken shelter here, what beast or knave.
For such great beauty thus to be immured
is a crime, an outrage not to be endured.

- 94 The maiden answers him with many sighs
and sobs, in broken sentences, and she
has tears of crystal pouring from her eyes
and coursing down her physiognomy
so that she swallows some. You recognize
that there is a story here, and we will see
what happened and what's going to happen next.
It will be, I promise, in Terzodecimo's text.

Canto Terzodecimo

- I As I was saying, a knight in those olden days
was lucky, for everywhere he turned he'd find
in valleys, caverns, bears' dens, or passageways
in cities some maiden to drive him out of his mind
with her all but unbearable beauty that would amaze
any of us, examples of womankind
better than what in a palace or chateau
one might expect to see. How come? Go, know!

- 2 So do not wrinkle your forehead or raise your brow
thinking of Orlando down in that cave,
and bumping into—never mind why or how—
this very pretty girl he intends to save
from whatever it is that has caused her weeping. Now
she takes a deep breath and manages to be brave
enough to tell the Count her sorry story,
trying not to be too recriminatory.
- 3 “I am sure, O knight, that I shall be punished for what
I say,” she told him, with a slight nod to the old
woman, adding, “She will report all that
I tell you to them who confine me here. But I hold
it useless to hide the truth. And I care not
what happens to me—for one day I shall be told
that they have decided at last that I must die.
There is no point in not explaining why.
- 4 “My name is Isabella, and I am
the daughter of the king of Galicia, or say
that’s what I was. Now I can only claim
to be the daughter of sorrow and dismay.
The fault is that of Love, whose wicked aim
is to entice with sweetness and then betray.
As we find out in the end, when he does us wrong,
that was his real intention all along.
- 5 “I was happy once: I was rich, young, admired,
and people thought me beautiful. And now
I am utterly wretched and poor, and I am tired
of life itself. If there is a state somehow
worse than what I’ve described, then I am mired
at the bottom of that deep pit. If you’ll allow
me, I’ll tell my tale: you may not be
able to help, but you can pity me.

- 6 “A year ago, my father held a tourney
in Bayonne, and to our land came many knights
from many distant countries who made the journey
to show their prowess in these ritual fights.
Among these was Zerbino. As you will learn, he
was son of the king of Scotland. By the lights
of Love, he seemed the finest of them there,
puissant, handsome, charming, and debonair.
- 7 “The feats of chivalry he performed were splendid,
and I could not take my eyes off him. The heart
in my bosom no longer belonged to me. It ended
badly, as you can see, and yet at the start
I could not have found a better man. But when did
happiness and love get pulled apart?
Has it always been this way? Or was it merely
my misfortune to have loved the man so dearly?
- 8 “He returned my love, and I believe that he
was honest and sincere. His show of ardor
was a match for my own and more. Whenever we
were separated he would send a card or
brief but loving note to say we’d be
together soon and that each moment was harder
than the one that had just passed. If we were apart,
still, he said, I was present in his heart.
- 9 “When the tourney was over, Zerbino of course returned
to Scotland, and we pined for each other day
and night, waking and sleeping. We both yearned
to be together again. What can I say?
We felt what lovers always feel. We learned
how bittersweet it can be. He was far away
but thinking always of how we could reunite,
how there had to be some way to do this in spite

- 10 “of the fact that we were of different faiths, for he was a Christian and I was a Saracen. This meant he could not ask my father to give me in marriage. Therefore, it was his intent that we would elope. He’d steal me stealthily away and take me with him wherever he went. Outside Bayonne, I had a garden where I’d go sometimes to breathe the fresh sea air,
- 11 “and Zerbino’s plan was to fetch me from that place. Near Santa Marta he had a galley hidden in the charge of Odorico, one of Biscay’s masters of warfare at land and sea. He had bidden this close and trusted comrade in arms to raise a crew and come to get me. And he did an excellent job of it too, appearing just at the time we had agreed and keeping his trust.
- 12 “He disembarked at night and with his men came to the garden in utter silence. There I waited for them, but I was startled when my servants, who’d been ordered to take care of me appeared. It got quite ugly then, for some were killed and others fled. A pair were seized with me. Unarmed, they could not fight. And that was how we disappeared that night.
- 13 “It was more violent than I’d expected, crude and brusque, but the plan had been to keep suspicion from attaching to me. Still, even if you’d condemn the means he chose to complete his mission, and if I admired his verisimilitude, I think of that violent evening with contrition. But I wasn’t thinking of servants. Or even of me. No, my mind was wholly focused on Zerbino.

- 14 “We were passing somewhere off Cape Finisterre
when a sudden wind came up on the port side,
and the sea was roiled and churned by the turbulent air.
Odorico and his crew attempted to ride
it out, but the mistrals that often happen there
narrow the range of options which were not wide
in the first place. Reef the sails? Brace the mast?
(And whatever you do, you have to do it fast.)
- 15 “The winds, already high, were getting stronger,
and there are sharp rocks near Rochelle that we
were being blown toward and in not much longer
would hit, break up, and go down into the sea.
Some of us prayed—I know I did—and wrong or
right in their details religions agree
that God can sometimes show his mercy to
those who put their trust in him. I do,
- 16 “but Odorico had a plan in mind
and took me with him into a little boat
with a couple of crewmen similarly inclined.
Indeed, more would have come, except that he smote
the hawser and cut us free so that the wind
could carry us away and let us float
or, rather, bounce to shore and solid ground
while the ship was wrecked and all its sailors drowned.
- 17 “And of course, all that we’d brought with us was lost—
clothing, jewels, mementos—but still I gave
thanks to Eternal Goodness that the most
precious thing I had he’d deigned to save,
my hope of seeing Zerbino again. The cost,
whatever it was, was worth it. I could be brave
thinking only and always of him, and of love
that perhaps had prompted this mercy from above.

- 18 “We staggered out of the water and found a shore
of utter and pathless desolation with no
sign of human habitation or
any natural shelter to which we could go.
There was only the bare rock and the ceaseless roar
of the winds and the waves that beat at it from below.
And yet with Odorico I had no fear.
Somehow we would contrive to persevere.
- 19 “But this is where Love was playing his nasty tricks
and taking pleasure in abrupt reversals and checks
by which he can put into a dreadful fix
those who don’t understand the power of sex,
that volatile ingredient in the mix
we think of as our lives. It’s most complex.
Zerbino trusted his friend Odorico, but
trust gives way when a man comes into rut.
- 20 “Who knows when it began? When we were at sea?
Or on land when we were nearly alone? He sent
one man to Rochelle to fetch a horse for me
so I wouldn’t have to walk. And Almonio went
(a Scotsman, loyal to Zerbino). Now there were three,
and Odorico revealed his real intent.
He couldn’t get rid of him gracefully and could trust
Corebo, a friend from Bilbao, to appreciate lust.
- 21 “Or at least he believed that he could, for they had been
pals since boyhood, brought up in the same great
house together, and they had been partners in
all kinds of high jinx. But to his surprise, his mate
objected and said it would be a most grievous sin
to betray Zerbino’s trust and tergiversate
in such a fashion. And to prove he meant it,
he drew his sword in an effort to prevent it.

- 22 “What kind of world is this, and how can it be
that a girl must always be deeply suspicious of men?
As soon as they started to fight, I decided to flee
into the woods where a cave or animal den
might offer someplace to hide. Or a hollow tree . . .
Behind me, I heard the clashing of blades, and again,
as Odorico, a master at arms, struck a blow
at his former friend Corebo and laid him low.
- 23 “I had no idea about what was happening there
but Odorico, following my trail
caught up to me, running fast as a randy hare
except that he was a much more menacing male.
I was appalled and disgusted. But he didn’t care,
and if tender words and a show of gentleness could
not persuade, he was willing to have recourse
to the application, if there was need, of force.
- 24 “I reminded him of the oath that he had taken
and his promise to Zerbino. I begged and pleaded
for mercy on this rocky and God-forsaken
spot, but I am afraid Odorico heeded
not a word of mine. I had not shaken
his wicked resolve and he concupiscently did
his best to undo my pretty bodice’s laces
and began to grope me in all the usual places.
- 25 “I defended myself as best I could with bites
and scratches, desperate screams (with no one to hear),
kicks and punches, but a woman, when she fights,
is at a disadvantage. It became clear
that my struggles only whetted his appetites.
Men are not only disgusting but rather queer
in the way they react, sometimes. This one was a beast
and as I fought him his lust only increased.

- 26 “I was in absolute despair, reduced
to hopelessness and the certainty that I
would be forcibly raped if I could not be seduced.
But the merciful heavens heard my desperate cry,
and a crowd of locals appeared—for they were used
to scavenging from any wreck nearby
of unlucky vessels. And on their greedy way
they saw me and that bad man from Biscay.
- 27 “Seeing the crowd, Odorico turns
away from me and runs to save his hide.
I am relieved and happy, but one learns
not to jump to conclusions. In that bromide
of the frying pan and the fire, one discerns
more than a grain of truth. They do provide
relief of a kind. I am not raped (not yet),
but they mean to sell me for whatever they can get.
- 28 “If anything, it seems to me more vile
than simple, honest lust, for this is greed
and calculated. These wretched mercantile
traders in flesh have, as their only creed,
a belief in profit. Filthy, they defile
whatever they touch. The lives these people lead
make one ask if money has moral gravity
that drags men down to such depths of depravity.
- 29 “They do not touch me, only because they know
that they can get more for a virgin in this trade,
and there is a ship on its way by which I’m to go
to the east to the Sultan’s harem, I am afraid.
They’ve held me here for eight months now, or, no,
it’s into the ninth. My dreams of Zerbino fade,
and my life, as far as I can tell, will conclude
in a nightmare of lascivious servitude.”

- 30 Her story was ended, but tears continued to run
down her sweet cheeks and now and then a sigh
would rack her body that surely would move anyone
to deepest pity. Orlando, standing by,
tried to find words to comfort her but none
seemed adequate—except to say that he'd try
to come to her aid in any way he could
and demonstrate that some men could be good.
- 31 It would have been a tender moment but
coming into the cave were a score of men
armed to the teeth, as they say, with long staffs cut
from hickory or walnut trees, and when
they saw the knight near the captive they had shut
up here, they were menacing, but then
their looks were such as could be terrifying
even when they relaxed and weren't trying.
- 32 One was missing an eye. Another was scarred
across his face and part of his nose was gone.
The features of every one of them were marred
in impressive ways. The one-eyed man took on
a leader's role and announced to his friends, all hard
cases, that life was good and they had won
another bird that was caught now in their trap,
“a gift from the skies that has fallen into our lap.”
- 33 It wasn't Orlando himself they wanted, but his
armor, his splendid cloak and all the gear
that he had with him. All this equipment is
expensive, and by a stroke of luck it was here
for them to take—but that hypothesis
was yet to be proven. Orlando showed no fear
as he rose to his feet to tell them that he would sell
the armor, but at a price that they might well

- 34 think too expensive. (Merchants know about price, but value is something else, as one comes to learn.) He snatched a log from the fire and with a nice side-arm toss flung it so it could burn the would-be thief—near the eye, to be precise. He watched him bellow in terrible pain and turn away, for the moment blinded, but then, instead, he fell down on the floor of the cave and was dead.
- 35 And for all we know the burning sensation does not diminish, assuming that what Alighieri said is true, and that thieves and brigands swim in a hot river of boiling blood and, though they are dead, still feel the heat that is the infernal lot of bandits and *masnadieri*, or so I have read. Whether or not there is such a fiery pit, nobody knows, but it's nice to imagine it.
- 36 Orlando, however, is busy. There in the cave is a huge table big enough for all the villains to sit at together. This the brave knight lifts and tosses with no small degree of strength and effort. It hits one knave in the head, and he goes down in a sudden fall. Another it strikes in the belly, and there are one or two whose arms and legs break. It is fun
- 37 of the kind a brave youth might have if he had found a nest of vipers sunning themselves and he picked up a good sized rock with which to pound them all into a disgusting pâté. You see one wriggle off in a hurry across the ground but missing its tail. Another, in agony, cannot move but writhes in its coil and twitches. So Orlando dealt with these sons of bitches.

- 38 According to Turpin, Archbishop of Rheims, who writes of these events, there were seven of them remaining after this demonstration of the knight's prowess. They tried to flee the cave, but restraining them Orlando posted himself at the site's narrow exit and then (it needs no explaining) took them as his captives and tied up each man with ropes he'd found in the cave. He had a plan,
- 39 to mete out proper justice to them. Near the entrance, he'd seen a gnarled ash tree that he could use, and cutting into the branches here and there, he made a kind of rookery, or rather a bird-feeder, to be quite clear, for he hung the villains up where they could be food for the crows and ravens. They are said to prize human flesh and especially the eyes.
- 40 He didn't need any chains and hooks because the tree had angled branches and he could find places on which to suspend them by their jaws. It isn't, I will grant you, very kind, but these were tough times, and some of chivalry's laws are harsher than ours today. But never mind. That's what he did to them. When you've discussed this, I'm sure you will agree it was rough justice.
- 41 And the old woman there in the cave? (You do remember her, I hope.) She flees as fast as her spindly legs can carry her into the maze of the dark wood in which, at last, she meets at a riverbank a warrior who will appear later on in the story. (They're both in the cast.) For the moment, we'll leave them there, but, as I say, we'll return. I have other fish to sauté.

- 42 In the cave we still have Isabella and
Orlando, and she is grateful and she says
she will follow him anywhere and that he's been grand.
Orlando is never comfortable with praise
but he comforts her and accedes to her demand.
She can come with him, at least for a few days.
Aurora, now. And garlands of flowers. The dawn
is breaking. You know the bit. We can go on.
- 43 They travel along together and, oddly enough,
have nothing to say to each other. What they have shared
in adventure is all that matters. The other stuff
fades away, I suppose, and neither one cared
to make idle chatter, which can be very tough
if you're not in the mood. (And we of course are spared
having to make up dialogue.) On the way
they meet a captive knight, about whom we'll say
- 44 a great deal more later on. My hands are full
of different strings I don't want to tangle. We
should pull on one from the multicolored wool
and follow it. So let the prisoner be,
and we'll return to Amon's daughter. (You'll
remember Bradamante, of course, and how she
was pining for Ruggiero in the worst way,
as she was waiting for him down in Marseilles.)
- 45 She was keeping busy of course, and would go out
sometimes to fight the pagans who ranged around
Provence and the Perigord and all about
Languedoc, robbing but never holding ground.
She harassed them and put their men to rout
in the discharge of her duties that she was bound
to undertake as any warrior would.
(On the battlefield she was always very good.)

- 46 She was never afraid for herself, but she worried and feared
for dear Ruggiero who was long overdue.
What could have happened to him? Would she have heard?
She often inquired, but no one she asked knew
a thing—until one day, Melissa appeared,
the enchantress who, you’ll remember, had taken to
Ruggiero that magic ring so he could be cured
of Alcina’s spells by which he had been immured.
- 47 It’s something of a shock for her to see
Melissa without Ruggiero. What has occurred?
What terrible thing has happened to him? Is he
all right? But Melissa is smiling and the word
she brings is good. There is no cause to be
alarmed. But still their reunion must be deferred.
Melissa explains that he is alive and well,
and adores her still, but there is more to tell.
- 48 “The truth,” she says, “is that he is imprisoned again
by your enemy, Atlas. And if you wish to free
him you must mount and come with me. I can
open those doors by which you can do what we
both desire.” She explains how it is that the man
has been deceived by the giant’s mimicry
that lures both knights and ladies and keeps them where
he wants them in that enchanted castle there.
- 49 She reveals his trick of intuiting the desire
of every person and offering just that
for which the man’s or woman’s heart is on fire,
but whatever it is, it’s just out of reach, which is what
keeps them there, searching through the entire
structure for that voice they keep hearing but
can never quite locate. It is a quest
that can never succeed but from which they never can rest.

50 “When you come to the region in which the castle lies,” she explains, “you will find that Atlas has put on the look of Ruggiero, deceiving your eyes, and it will appear that he’s being set upon by someone stronger than he and larger in size. You will want to help him and will be drawn after them, which is how he baits the trap the springs of which, when anyone enters, snap.

51 “What you must do, and I know that this will be difficult, is ignore what your eyes will say and understand that it is not really he, but only an imitation designed to betray and capture you. Ignore, then, what you see and when he asks for your help, you must make him lay down his life. You must kill him on the spot. You’ll never see Ruggiero if you do not.”

52 How can she do this? Kill a facsimile of Ruggiero? It will require trust beyond all reason, for the contradictory impulses may render her nonplussed (or even minused). But with enough faith she may, at the critical moment, manage—just. She follows after Melissa in great haste through forest, meadow, tith, and empty waste.

53 As they progress, they are able to maintain an entertaining conversation that makes their path smooth and all the rough places plain. I won’t try to do every word they spoke—that takes not only a lot of effort but time, and the main purpose, I think, is to get there, and chatter breaks the pace and flow that is part of the narrative. There is, nevertheless, information to give.

- 54 Melissa was privy to secrets of the divine
gods and could tell the future (tomorrow's news).
She mentioned once again the noble line
of Este that Bradamante would produce
and Ruggiero, brave, and wise, and fine.
The maiden, trying not to be obtuse,
asks about the women who will be,
she hopes, an important part of the family.
- 55 The courteous mage is willing to satisfy
her companion's curiosity and she says.
"Along with the splendid males who by and by
will arise, there are also women worthy of praise,
mothers of kings and emperors, of high
intelligence and gentle in their ways,
lofty in their nobility, devout,
and each of them I ought to speak about.
- 56 "But that would take too long, I am afraid,
and therefore I shall select only one or two
couples about whom comments may be made,
so that you can judge the many from these few.
It would have been better, however, if that parade
of images could appear to make vivid for you
their personalities. Had you asked before
in the cavern, I could have told—and shown you—more.
- 57 "Consider, for instance, Isabella, of whom
I know not what to say first: she is wise, chaste,
beautiful, charming, and generous. She will make bloom
Mantua on the Mincio, which has embraced
the house of Gonzaga. She and her bridegroom
will rival one another in how they have graced
the city they love and over which they rule,
master and mistress together of courtesy's school.

- 58 “Her husband, the intrepid Francesco II,
will distinguish himself at the battle on the Taro
and help drive the French from Naples. He will be reckoned
a true hero. But that appellation is narrow,
and if Ulysses after his long trek and
return to Ithaca (not quite straight as an arrow)
merited praise, then so did Penelope
for her patience and cunning in keeping her chastity.
- 59 “A splendid woman altogether, and I
leave out much more than I include for she
is a paragon, as Merlin showed me by
that hollow rock, and if I sailed the sea
with Tiphys on the Argo’s voyage, my
course would not require such a degree
of constant effort as to include the whole
list of the virtues of her heart and soul.
- 60 “Of her sister Beatrice, what is there better
to say than that her name, which means one who
makes others happy, is strictly and to the letter
correct in every way, for this she will do
as long as she lives, and this great gift will get her
much love in return? When she at last comes to
the end of her mortal span, the husband she
made happy will sink to the depths of misery.
- 61 “But while she lives, the Visconti’s viper bite
and the Sforza mulberry will arouse great fear
from the arctic snows to the southern desert’s white
glare near the Red Sea and the hemisphere
from the Indus to Gibraltar will know their might.
(After her death, the French will domineer
the Lombards, and all Italy will deplore it
until one day some hero comes to restore it.)

- 62 “Without her sage advice as counselor
and friend to her husband Ludovico, he
would have been considered lucky or
at best the willing beneficiary
of others’ mistakes. But they get credit for
all that they accomplished together, she
being as much admired and adored
as he, the loving lady and her lord.
- 63 “There will be other Beatrices: I mean
Aldobrandino’s daughter who’ll marry the king
of Hungary and wear its crown as queen
(which is by no means an insignificant thing).
Another, the daughter of Azzo VI, will be seen
as having attained such holiness as to bring
sanctification, and men will pray on their knees
to her image to ask her for help and protection, please.
- 64 “I could go on, but there are so many, and each
deserves a stanza if not an entire canto,
so I shall keep in my heart the wonderfully rich
stories of all the Biancas that I might want to
tell, and Lucrezias, and Constanzas that teach
lessons in how to live and to govern and grant to
all examples of how to be true and good
models of fine Italian womanhood.
- 65 “Now that I think of it, it seems to me
that while your descendants’ daughters will be fine,
they will be equaled in virtue and quality
by those who marry into your noble line,
splendid women every one. I see
what Merlin showed me using his divine
foreknowledge, and I shall recount to you
what kind of women they are and give them their due.

- 66 “Take, for just one instance, Ricciarda. You’d never find in the annals anywhere a better example of patience and fortitude. Widowed young, she struggles with despair when her sons are sent into exile, but the shrewd mother keeps her faith alive—and they’re restored in the end and return to their rightful places where she welcomes them with motherly embraces.
- 67 “And of the queen from Aragon I should say at least a word or two, for no Greek or Latin encomium would be good enough to praise her wisdom and chastity. So by heaven’s grace she brings forth her brood: Isabella, Alfonso, Hippolito, three ornaments in the rich Estense crown, each one most deserving of renown.
- 68 “And of her second daughter-in-law, the sweet Lucrezia Borgia, what can I say but that she, with beauty and grace (and a fortune at her feet) will bring to the house great fame. Her name will be on every tongue forever, as is meet and proper. Like a thriving plant or tree planted in soft rich earth, her fame will thrive to last as long as a memory may survive.
- 69 “As black lead is to silver, as copper to gold, as the poppy in the meadow is to the rose, as the pale willow is to the laurel (cold but evergreen in the winter when it shows its worth), as colored glass to the thousand-fold more precious ruby, so is she to those who up to now are famed for wisdom, grace, and beauty of the body and the face.

- 70 “Even aside from her personal perfection,
she must be given credit as well for what
she does for her children. Under her direction,
Ercole and the others whom she begot
will learn how to carry themselves—from their connection
with her (as who would think that they might not?)—
as a bottle that had once contained a scent
will still smell sweet after its contents are spent.
- 71 “And I cannot ignore her daughter-in-law (or *nuora*)
Renata, the daughter of Louis XII and Anne
of Brittany. She comes to Ferrara for a
wedding to Ercole II, who is a man
of singular gifts, and Lucrezia’s son. (I adore a
wedding, don’t you?) Renata, one hardly can
praise too much. Virtues as vast as the sky
are united in her. (Believe me, I do not lie.)
- 72 “It would take a while I’m afraid, and we have not got so
much time as Alda of Saxony’s story would need.
She will become the wife of Albertazzo,
and she will bring honor to the house. Indeed,
there’s the Countess of Celano who’ll marry Azzo.
And to her and Bianca Maria we ought to pay heed
(she is the Catalan). And then there’s the daughter
of Carlo II of Sicily. But time gets shorter.
- 73 “And Obbizo III’s second wife, Lipa
of Bologna, a splendid woman, ought to have
at least a passing mention. I could keep a
list like this going for hours of brave
and worthy women. But with a little dipper
one cannot empty the sea. We’ll have to save
the others for another opportune
occasion, which I hope will come quite soon.”

- 74 She actually spoke of several more, but those
I think we can pass over. You can look
them up in any history, I suppose,
that has an index of names in the back of the book.
She reminded Bradamante of her foe's
wiles, and then, at a certain point, she took
her leave, lest Atlas see she was nearby,
and wished her well. (And so do you and I.)
- 75 But yet again, she warns her that the trial
she faces won't be easy and she must
remember Melissa's explanation while
she confronts a figure that looks just
like Ruggiero but isn't. With a smile,
she waves once more and hopes what they've discussed
will remain fixed in her mind. They separate
and the maiden rides on alone at a rapid gait.
- 76 She has not gone two miles before she sees
what she has been told about—two giant men
are attacking the spit-and-image (if you please)
of Ruggiero. She looks at him again . . .
The giants are winning. The knight is on his knees
and seems to be near death. The equestrienne
tries hard to disbelieve her eyes, but this
face and this body are very clearly his.
- 77 She wonders whether Melissa might have some odd
reason to lie, some wicked plot to arrange
that Ruggiero be killed by his own lover. God,
that would be awful! And life is very strange.
The wicked can try to pass as good. (A nod
to the wise is sufficient.) These sorcerers seem to change
back and forth quite often. How can one tell?
Shouldn't she trust her eyes? And her heart as well?

- 78 She's thinking of all this, although it takes
only a second or two, but now she hears
Ruggiero's voice (her very spirit quakes)
calling to her for help, help, and it tears
her apart. He frees himself and makes
a vault onto his horse nearby, which rears
and races away. His enemies give chase.
She cannot help but follow in the race
- 79 which leads (we are not surprised) to the palace gate.
Once she's inside she finds herself in the same
fix as all the others. Through the straight
and crooked hallways, calling out his name,
she searches for Ruggiero. A cruel fate
has them pass each other, both with one aim,
but because of the spell she does not recognize
him, and the same enchantment clouds his eyes.
- 80 And there we'll leave them a while, but do not fear,
for, when the right time comes, we will let her go.
And not only will she escape but also her dear
Ruggiero, I promise. But now, something different. No?
As they say at the banquet table, let us clear
our palates and refresh our taste buds, so
we'll have new flavors, in order not to bore
the audience I'm writing all this for.
- 81 In this great web we have many strands and you
may not be displeased if we were to change the scene
to where the Moorish army is in review
before King Agramant where they have been
threatening the fleur-de-lys. To do
their very best against the French, they are keen
to be at fighting strength in their array
of troops and well prepared for the crucial day.

- 82 But the roster is depleted. Knights and many
foot soldiers are missing. Captains are gone
from Spain and Libya. There is hardly any
discipline. Whole squadrons are left alone
to fend for themselves as well as they can. And when he
sees that this is so, the king sends on
to Spain and Africa emissaries to
recruit fresh troops and knights, while he will do
- 83 what he can see is needful—to organize
the soldiers he has, restore the chain of command,
and put the men in order as is wise
before a battle. We all understand
how this is vital, and we sympathize.
But it takes a while to accomplish this business and,
with your indulgence, I shall defer it. We
need a rest now, and maybe a drink or three.

Canto Quartodecimo

- 1 In the many years of warfare in battles between
the Africans and the Spanish on one hand
and on the other the French, great numbers had been
killed and left to the wolves that roam the land
or the crows and hungry eagles with their keen
vision always scanning for carrion and
such dainty tidbits. The French had yielded more
land, but the Saracens had paid much in gore
- 2 of noble princes and barons. They had won
many engagements but at so great a cost
they might as well have lost when all was done
and said. A recent example that is most

illustrative is that of Ravenna, one
at which, O great Alfonso, with your host
you saved the day when the Spanish forces threatened
alongside those of the Pope, Julius II.

3 And yet Ravenna's eyes still brim with tears
though when troops from Picardy and Aquitaine
had to give ground, you came to calm their fears
and charged into the Spaniards, for whom the gain
of the city was then in reach. Your fusiliers
well deserved the honors you gave them, for Spain
was driven back with their banners of yellow and red
because you and your gallants stopped them and they fled.

4 The Pope's forces as well with his acorns of gold
on their proud standards broke and ran away,
so the lily of France emerged unsmudged. And we're told
that your valiant efforts not only saved the day
but kept Fabrizio safe, that very bold
Colonna who otherwise, to our dismay
would have been taken captive. For that alone
another triumphal wreath should deck your crown.

5 That deed by itself would have brought to you
as much glory as if you had struck down,
single-handed, the array of Spaniards who
threatened Ravenna, those from Aragon,
Navarre, and Castile who positively flew
leaving their banners to be trampled on,
for their chariots with blades had done them no
good whatever, and, therefore, they had to go.

6 That victory though was more of a consolation
than any occasion for triumph or feeling of gladness,
because we had suffered ourselves such devastation
and the loss of Gaston di Foix. It was, rather, sadness

that the whirlwinds of war had, in their depredation,
taken up many princes in their madness
who had crossed the frigid Alps to help us in our
moment of need but succumbed to Death's dark power.

- 7 We recognize that we were saved, of course,
by what you did to hold back the tempest of Jove
that was about to break on us with great force,
but the lamentations of those who were in love
with the fallen arouse our pity and remorse.
King Louis must now appoint new leaders of
those squadrons that suffered for the lily's honor
and fought those who'd have brought disgrace upon her,
- 8 raping nuns, torturing friars, looting
the houses of helpless women and their small
children, defiling churches, and prostituting
the holy wafer, while they were pillaging all
the ecclesiastical silver—deeds more suiting
to savages than civilized men. I'd call
Brescia, which capitulated, less
unhappy than we were in our success.
- 9 Send, O Louis, Trivulzio to teach
your soldiers more restraint and control them better,
for Italy lies bleeding and hurt from each
desecration. He must enforce the letter
of the military code that now, in the breach,
is more honored than in observance. To get our
forces in good order is what we want,
and so it was also the aim of Agramant.
- 10 He and Marsilio, King of Spain, commanded
that the army leave their winter bivouac
to assemble so they could reckon how short-handed
they were and then to bring the forces back

to readiness. Dorifebo, the Catalan, did as ordered—but those from Navarre surely felt the lack of King Folvirante whom Rinaldo had killed. (With Isolier that vacancy was filled.)

- 11 Balugante is put in command of those from Leon, and Grandonio leads those from the Algarve. Falsirone, a brother and close advisor to Marsilio, gets men who had come from lesser Castile. And to go against the foes, the men from Seville and Malaga (even some from Cordova) rally around Madarasso's banner and parade past Agramant in a lively manner.
- 12 Stordilano, Tesira, and Baricondo with their people from Granada, Lisbon, and Majorca come by. The men of Granada respond (oh, dear!) to the first of these, while the command of those from Lisbon is that of the secondo who succeeded the late Larbin. The master hand of Majorca was that of the third of these, whose station you've figured out by simple elimination.
- 13 Maricoldo of Galicia is dead and in his place stands Serpentino. Sinagon, too, has bought it and so his troops from Calatrava (let there be no drooping eyelids) and Toledo miss his leadership which passes to . . . (I see no objection?) Matalista of whom they say that he is competent in every way.
- 14 Asturga and Salamanca were united under Bianzardin, along with those from Avila, Piaganza, and (I'm delighted to say) Zamora and Palenza. Close

behind are the Saragossans whom we've sighted
under Ferrau's command, who also chose
to lead Marsilio's personal bodyguard,
well equipped men who always fight quite hard.

15 Among these men are Malgarino (who?),
Balinverno, and Malzarise (yes,
what a chewy name!). And there's Morgante, too.
They all had lost their kingdoms, and, now landless,
had joined Marsilio's court as one would do
if one were a Spanish nobleman, I guess.
And Follicon of Almeria, the strong
bastard son of Marsilio? He's come along.

16 Bavarte, Largalifa, Doriconte,
and Analardo too (great names for a cat!)
are there, and also Archidante (won't a
rhymester get a break?). But I tip my hat
to him—he is Seguntum's noble conte.
L'Amirante and Langhiran (now that
is not so bad!) are there, and Malagur.
(Each one I name means that there is one fewer.)

17 So that's the army of Spain, but there are more
to come in this review. The King of Oran,
almost a giant, has shown up for the war,
and next are the Garamants, who are missing a man—
Martasin, whom Bradamante killed before
our story's beginning. (Their grief is greater than
it would have been had he not been killed by
a woman, which is a disgraceful way to die.)

18 Next is the Marmonda contingent (I
think that's in Africa). Argosto, their leader,
died in Gascony, and thus they are shy
a captain, as are the companies that precede or

follow. And these King Agramant must supply.
He may not have the captains that he'd need or
want, but he must make do. Buraldo is plucky.
Ormida and Agriano are dumb but lucky.

- 19 Arganio got them from Libicana, still
sad at the death of Dudrindasso. Next
the Tingitanans got Brunello. (Will
he ever cheer up again from having vexed
King Agramant by losing the ring in that ill-
fated encounter? You can look it up in the text.
Near Atlas' castle, remember? If you want to
check, I think it's in an early canto.)
- 20 What happened after we left him? Isoliero,
Ferrau's brother, found him tied to that tree.
Agramant asked what kind of incompetent hero
he was to have been so stupid and said that he
deserved to be hanged. His chances looked to be zero,
for the noose was around his neck, but clemency
was what his friends begged for, and the king let
him live. But lest the knight chance to forget
- 21 that the king was annoyed, he kept the rope and said
that if he messed up again, he could once more
on the gallows have its noose slipped over his head.
The king raised his hand, nodded, and solemnly swore.
A chastening business, with more shame in it than dread,
and Brunello now has much to make up for.
Farurant is next, leading a force
made up of Mauritania's foot and horse.
- 22 And comes then King Libanio along with his men
from Constantina where Pinadoro ruled,
but when Ruggiero killed him Agramant then
gave the crown and scepter (both of gold)

to Libanio. (Hail! And say Amen.)
Now Soridano passes by with the bold
soldiers of Hesperia. (All these names
are sure winners, I'd think, in Trivia games.)

23 It's Dorilon now, with men from Ceuta (across
from Gibraltar, that is), and Puliano behind
with the troops from Nasamona (I'm at a loss
at that one, but the name is as good as we find
anywhere in this catalogue). Then there's the boss
of the Fezzan, Malbuferso (or strike me blind!).
From Morocco and the Canaries beneath the device
of Finadurro are squadrons of burly guys.

24 From Djerba, the late King Tardocco's men
pass in review. Balastro is in command.
And the men from Mulga, leaderless, but then
Agramant gives them to Corineo's hand.
Then, under old Bambirago, are ten
companies from Arzilla, an impressive band.
(And I venture to make a bet, no matter how clever
you are, you've never heard of Arzilla. Ever!)

25 Agramant also elevates the deserving
Caico to be king of Almansilla
(Tanfirion once ruled over it). And serving
as king of Getulia, Rimedonte will fill a
vital role. After them the upright unswerving
Balinfronte of Cosca comes. (And will a
list like this go on forever? No,
and I rather doubt that you'd be hoping so.)

26 The men of Bolga (boatmen?) under their king
Clarindo (who succeeded Maribaldo)
come next, and then I drain my glass to sing
of Baliverzo, the worst of the lot, who shall do

whenever he has the chance some terrible thing,
even more distressing than what they all do.
Next is Sobrino the prudent Saracen,
a firm and fair commander of his men.

27 Rodomonte leads the Bellamarina
contingent (as Gualciotto used to do).
The king of Algiers and Sarza, he was in a
recruiting drive back in Africa and you
would admire his footmen and cavalry who have been a
great help to Agramant, bringing their new
strength that he will need. It was three days
ago that he returned to Agramant's praise.

28 But Rodomonte deserves more than a mere
mention in a catalogue. He is strong
and brave and therefore famous. The French fear
his very name that resonates along
the roads to Paris. (Not even Agramant here
or Marsilio—I don't mean to do them wrong—
arouse such awe in the enemy.) And he
hates and despises Christianity.

29 Prusione is next. He is king of those
who live in the Alvaracchie (we call
the Canary Islands) and following him close
behind is Dardinello who rules all
Zumara (near Casablanca, though God knows
exactly where). There is, however, a small
problem in that owls and ravens hoot
and croak to say that something bad is afoot

30 for one of them or the other, and heaven's decree
is that on the next day one shall die in the fight.
But neither of them reacts, for what will be
will be, and all of us face that endless night.

And that is the end of it—I mean that we
are done with the list, for no one else is in sight.
But Tremisen and Norizia? Where are they?
Where are their leaders? Can anyone here say?

31 These are the questions Agramant is posing
to his close advisors, and reasonable they are.
Is everyone in Tremisen just dozing?
Is Norizia full of cowards? Oh, no, it's far
different and worse. A squire comes, disclosing
reliable news he brings from the fog of war.
Alzirdo and Manilardo lie on the ground
with the corpses of most of their soldiers strewn around.

32 “My lord,” he said, “it was a valiant knight
who killed our men, and had we not defended
ourselves for so long in a truly unequal fight,
he'd have come here and all by himself would have ended
your plans and destroyed your entire army. My flight,
at my king's command, was to report what our men did.
He does to our men what a wolf does to defenseless
goats and sheep in a carnage that's bloody and senseless.”

33 Some days before, there had appeared a new
formidable African knight in the camp, a mighty
man, bettered by none and equaled by few,
famous throughout the world for how he could fight. He
was the son of the powerful king of Tartary. (You
have heard perhaps of Agrican?) All right, he
was named Mandricardo, known for his noble deeds.
Whomever he goes against, he always succeeds.

34 But what he was no doubt most famous for
was how in the Syrian fairy's castle some dread
adventure that now is part of the local lore
had gained him the shining breastplate that was said

to have been worn by Hector in days of yore
when Trojans and Achaians fought and bled.
That it was a thousand years old is perfectly true,
but the breastplate seemed to be as good as new.

- 35 Mandricardo's ears perked up and his eyes
narrowed as he heard this dramatic news.
His resolve was formed in the instant (not a surprise)
that he would go after this warrior who would lose
and thus bring him glory. He could visualize
their confrontation. Of course, he did not choose
to let his intention be known. He wanted to be
the one to do it. Who would be better than he?
- 36 He asked the squire how the man was dressed
and he answered the prince, saying, "He is all sable,
armor and shield, and he does not wear a crest."
And this was the truth, for Orlando (as you are able
to figure out) in his sadness thought it best
to show a black exterior that would label
him as a knight who grieved. It was to his liking,
and we can agree that it was very striking.
- 37 Marsilio has given him a steed,
a bay with black legs and a black mane,
and Mandricardo leaps up on him (you need
to remember that he's in armor: it's germane).
He swears he won't return until he has freed
the army from this scourge and he has slain
the champion whose armor is all black,
and he rides away without ever glancing back.
- 38 On his way he meets survivors mourning their sons
or brothers. Orlando has killed them before their eyes.
And then he starts seeing the corpses themselves by ones
and twos and then in heaps that dramatize

a carnage that any sensible person shuns.
But what he feels is envy at the size
and number of the wounds and the ghastly piles
of bodies that produce in him stern smiles.

39 He is a wolf that has discovered the bare
bones of a dead ox farmers have left,
and the dogs and carrion birds have all been there
to strip it clean, so the hungry wolf is bereft
at having missed the banquet. It isn't fair.
That they arrived before him seems a theft
of what should have been his, and his appetite
is only whetted by this dismal sight.

40 After a day and a half he finds a small
clearing where a river winds to make
almost a loop, and gathered there are all
the knights in armor that the place will take.
Near Oricoli, the Tiber, as I recall,
does something like this, winding like a snake
so that there's almost a little island there
where Romans sometimes come to take the air.

41 Mandricardo asks them why there are so
many of them gathered. His appearance is
impressive in order to dazzle any foe,
and it glitters with gold and gems, so they answer his
question quite respectfully—that they go
as escorts to the Princess of Cadiz . . .
Or, no, it is Granada. (I regret
the awkwardnesses that these rhymes can beget.)

42 She is betrothed to the King of Sarza, although
this is not widely known yet. All the same,
they are bringing her to the Spanish encampment so
the wedding can take place there. Playing a game,

and to test whether the escort is *comme il faut*,
the Tartar answers them and says the fame
of her beauty is widespread, and it would be
delightful to meet her and have a chance to see

- 43 for himself. The captain from Granada tries
not to laugh and asks, “Are you quite mad?
Or are you merely stupid?” These replies
are not exactly what Mandricardo had
in mind, and he strikes the fellow—by surprise—
with his sharp spear and skewers him just a tad
below the sternum. He collapses to the ground,
and his armor makes a kind of jingling sound.
- 44 The Tartar pulls the spear point out. He’s got
no sword or mace, for they were missing when
he took great Hector’s armor. And he will not
carry another sword (he promised then)
but the one Orlando carries that Hector fought
with long ago. It turns out, gentlemen,
that Durindana, which he is so eager for,
was used against the Greeks in the Trojan War.
- 45 This means, as you can imagine, that he goes
into battle with a disadvantage that
only makes it more fun, for his enemy knows
that there is a certain disdain in the man coming at
him without a sword, relying on blows
and jabs with a spear as against some dandiprat.
“Does any of you dare to block my way?”
is what they hear the arrogant Tartar say.
- 46 And then he goes against them and with his lance
kills a goodly number who are trying
with sword or spear or mace to exploit some chance
to hurt him but now, themselves, are dead or dying.

But then, by some unfortunate circumstance,
the head breaks off the lance he was relying
on in the battle. I'm afraid here he grandstands
a little and keeps on killing with his bare hands.

47 And the shaft of the spear, of course, which he's able to wield
and cudgel with, smashing their skulls like eggs.
He is laughing aloud at this and having a field
day of it, killing all these useless yeggs.
An impressive feat, but biblical stories yield
a number of examples. Samson begs
to be mentioned at least. Go to the head of the class
if you've thought of him and the jawbone of the ass.

48 They begin to flee, the third of them that are still
alive, that is. He chases after them though
as if they were robbing money from his till.
Doesn't he have the right to destroy them? No?
(They don't think so.) The Tartar continues to kill
until the very last of them is laid low.
He is like a flame that consumes an entire farm
in a matter of moments, relentless in its harm.

49 So there's no one left guarding the princess, right?
And Mandricardo hears the sound of weeping.
He figures now that he's killed the guards, he might
as well go have a look at what they were keeping
away from him. The corpses are a sight,
but he is proud of what he has been reaping
in so little time. Then, leaning on a tree,
he sees a young woman. Aha! It must be she.

50 The name as he soon learns is Doralice,
and she is pouring a steady stream of tears
that fall on the mounds of her bosom, which is peachy
and pink. She is troubled of course now by fears,

but she also grieves for the dead—for all and each he has just killed. And as the knight appears befouled with their blood that mixes with his sweat the sobbing maiden is even more upset.

51 After all, it isn't just the men at arms she worries about, but the servants, too, women, girls, old men, for some have been with her for years. And here in just a few minutes they will be killed by this denizen of hell, who is approaching. . . . What can she do? She cannot move, can hardly take a breath as she stands there anticipating certain death.

52 On his side, when he sees this weeping face it takes his breath away. (So they match in this.) He wants to comfort her with an embrace. He is caught in the nets of love! And one of his first thoughts is that in this very sorry case, weeping, if this is how she appears, what is her face like when she's smiling? She is more fair than any maiden of Spain. Or of anywhere!

53 A curious thing: the captor has become the captive's captive. As the two stand there, there almost seems to be a kind of hum of complicated forces in the air as the power of domination transfers from him to her. He does not know or care how, but it is happening and he is captivated and yet is feeling free.

54 Still, he thinks, she may not know this yet, and he may be able to keep the upper hand as least for a while. His hope now is to get her to himself—as we can understand.

To try to soothe her grief somehow and let
her spirits return is what he now has planned.
There's a white pony she has that she can ride
through pleasant country lanes with him at her side.

- 55 As they depart, her servants and her staff
gather round and offer to come, but he
dismisses them all with a wave and a pleasant laugh
and tells them not to worry, that he will be
chamberlain, nurse, and attendant—and is not half
kidding. They go away, reluctantly,
weeping and sighing for their lady who
waves goodbye. And she is weeping too.
- 56 What will become of King Stordilano's dear
daughter? Who is that dreadful man on the horse?
They whisper these questions into each other's ear
as the knight carries their mistress away by force.
The Tartar, who is alone in his good cheer,
feels not the slightest iota of remorse,
but is pleased at fate for having given him such
a prize for his valor. And thank you very much.
- 57 The first thing is to get her to stop crying,
which he does with pretty stories he invents
about how for a long time he has been trying
to meet her and from home has traveled hence
not to see Spain or France or for edifying
touristic reasons, but only for his intense
desire to behold the famous beauty
he'd heard about. And this became his duty.
- 58 "If a man can be loved for loving," he suggests,
"then I surely merit your love, for my devotion
has moved me more than it does in the hardened breasts
of fighting men. And if you have some notion

that I am not worthy of you, then by such tests
I can assure you of—let me not be gauche—an
honorable and impressive pedigree:
my father was Agrican of Tartary.

59 “Or perhaps you think that the brave deserve the fair,
but have I not proved myself to you today?
If riches are what you want, look anywhere
and you will find no wealthier fiancé.”

These words and others like them were not bare-
faced lies but only what Love told him to say,
feeding him lines as if he were an actor
so that he could calm or at the least distract her.

60 And would you believe? She starts at last to hear
what he is saying. Her terror fades. She knows
well how the game is played, for in her sphere
at court, that’s what girls learn to do, I suppose,
at a very early age. With half an ear,
she deigns to listen a little to some of those
things he tells her—that are not quite to be
believed, but then it’s only play, you see.

61 He pauses, perhaps to think of more, and she
thinks it’s her turn now and so she says
something non-committal that yet may be
encouraging to him to continue with his praise
of her beauty, which is nice to hear: while he
is flattering her it’s likely that his mind stays
fixed on love rather than war. She’d rather
feel safe, even if she must listen to blather.

62 The light is failing, the temperature is dropping,
and evening is coming on, when creatures rest.
Mandricardo thinks they should be stopping
somewhere to spend the night, and with much zest

he hurries a bit as above the horses' clip-clopping
he hears the sounds of flutes from the prettiest
collection of farmhouses with smoke rising
and the smell of cooking which is most appetizing.

63 And what do you think happened that night between
Doralice and Agrican's son? Do you
think . . . ? (Wink, wink! Nudge, nudge! Know what I mean?)
I'll let you imagine what you like. But it's true
that in the morning both of them were seen
to be somewhat more cheerful. And calmer, too.
She thanked the shepherd for putting them up, and he
said they were welcome, responding most courteously.

64 They set forth on the road again on a clear
and fresh morning until they find a stream
so smooth in its mirror surface that it might appear
not to be moving at all except that the gleam
of a bright reflection dazzles and dances here
and there. It is all as restful as in a daydream.
On the bank, under a tree in a pleasantly shady
spot they find two knights and also a lady.

65 But now, to use a phrase from Alighieri,
my "alta fantasia" (you can read that!)
doesn't follow one path, but like a fairy
darts, or better, dances like a cat
on a hot tin roof. (I've always found that scary.)
Let us, gentles, direct our attention at
Agramant's tent, near Paris, where the fleur-
de-lys is in grave danger from the Moor.

66 Rodomonte threatens to burn the city
down to the ground. King Agramant has heard
of the reinforcements coming from England—a pity,
for it means that Moorish forces must quickly gird

their loins and attack at once. The steering committee—
Marsilio and Sobrino—have conferred
and they agree that their chances right away
are better than if they wait even one more day.

- 67 In Paris the mood is grim, and Charlemagne
orders that masses be said by priests and friars—
the white, the black, and the gray—and it is plain
that he is deeply concerned. He also requires
that all be shriven to keep their souls from the pain
of roasting forever in the eternal fires.
They obey, but they do this in profoundest sorrow,
for what it assumes is that they will die tomorrow.
- 68 With his princes, prelates, barons, and paladins
Charlemagne in the cathedral prays to heaven
with his hands raised, repenting of his sins
and confessing that he is not worthy. Even
so, he asks the Lord who disciplines
with justice but also mercy to reprieve an
admirable and faithful nation that should
not be punished because he has not been good.
- 69 “But if we must die,” he says in his prayer, “then let
it not be by your enemy’s hand, but postpone
the punishment that it is right we should get
to another day, for we are your flock and have known
your goodness and your glory, as the pagans have yet
to recognize. Do not let them mock your throne
and say that you are powerless and weak.
Others around the world will hear them speak,
- 70 “and rebellious souls will everywhere appear
to proclaim that the law of Islam is to be
preferred to what we all believe in here.
Defend our faith in you that men may see

how the sepulcher has been cleansed and know that we're
the Holy Church that believes in the Trinity.
Whatever our faults may be, you must recognize
what our defeat would mean in all men's eyes.

- 71 “We do not deserve—no one ever does—
your aid, but if you throw into the scale
your grace, the greatest gift there ever was,
the depravity of our lives, imperfect and frail,
diminishes some, which is how mankind has
cause for hope and help that cannot fail.
Pardon us, we pray, indulge, forgive,
and—for your own glory—let us live.”
- 72 This, and more, was what the emperor said,
in piety, humility, and contrition,
with many solemn vows, as the great man pled
for deliverance from the perilous condition
in which they found themselves. His hoary head
was bowed and his hands were clasped in the position
the devout assume. And every single word
he uttered there his better angel heard,
- 73 and he spread his wings and took them up to the sky
to relay them to the Savior who died for our
sins. And others' angels ascended by
the scores and hundreds to multiply the power
of prayer to all the saints to ratify
the request to the everlasting Lover to shower
his mercy on the Christians who had prayed
for his forgiveness and also for his aid.
- 74 And He of ineffable goodness to whom no
prayer by a faithful heart can be in vain
raises his eyes and with his hand makes a slow
gesture to Michael the angel that makes it plain

that he is needed, and he instructs him: “Go to the Christian army now at the mouth of the Seine and lead it at once to the walls of Paris without alerting the Moorish forces camped all about.

- 75 “First, you must find Silence,” he says, “and tell him to come with you: he will know how to do what needs to be done. Then, you should go as well to Discord, and have her take her flint stone to kindle a flame in the camp where the Moors now dwell, fomenting quarrels and making much hullabaloo so that they may fight with one another and kill or wound at least, causing much blood to spill.”
- 76 The angel says not a word but spreads his wings and flies from heaven. The clouds wherever he goes give way before him, as servants do before kings, and an eerie light suffuses his path—like those of summer lightning storms when the flickerings enliven the sky as it rains and a chill wind blows. But where in the world should he look for Silence? Would he be in some church or convent or priory?
- 77 One would surely think so, and the word is written on signs up on walls to remind the monks and friars not to indulge in absurd chatter. The angel asks where he can find Silence, but they answer that that bird has long ago flown—he and all his kind, Piety, Humility, Love, and Peace were driven away from such precincts as these
- 78 by Gluttony, Avarice, Sloth, Envy, Pride, Cruelty, and Wrath. How can this be? The angel is further puzzled that inside these walls is Discord. He also wanted to see

her, but thought that he would have to ride down to Avernus among the damned where she might be expected to dwell. But she is here among these holy men. It's very queer.

- 79 He can recognize her at once by her strange cloak of multicolored tatters that pell-mell fall open at any breeze. Her hair is a joke, partly plaited but partly loose as well and falling on back and bosom in baroque multicolored swirls in a fricandel of styles and shades. She clutches in both her hands writs, affidavits, complaints, and legal demands.
- 80 The poor are always with us, and more often than not, they feel that life is unfair and they go to court demanding that their lot be improved. They have got reason to be unhappy. Their favorite sport is complaining about injustice, but then what has that to do with the case? Better a short shrift than none at all. Around her are clerks, lawyers, notaries, registrars—the works.
- 81 Michael called her over and gave her his instructions—that she was to go among the Moors and incite them to quarrels. After all that is her pleasure and her business. Civil wars are always the best and have the greatest fizz, like iced champagne that someone pleasant pours. He also asked if she had heard of or seen Silence in any places where she'd been.
- 82 She answered that she'd often heard his name but hadn't seen him lately. People say Fraud is often with him in the same dark and unsavory places. Perhaps she may

have some idea . . . Her index finger's aim
was at a companion who stood not far away.
"That is she," Discord said with a nod
and a smile to Michael, archangel of God.

83 Fraud had a pleasant face, a proper dress,
an engaging way of turning down her gaze,
and a pattern of modest speech. Her politesse
was all one could want in a well-reared maiden these days.
She could have been Gabriel coming to express
the holy spirit's greeting that would amaze
the blessed virgin. She was in her decorum
as solemn as any senator in the forum.

84 Her body, however, was all deformed and bent
although she covered herself with a flowing gown
that hid her many defects. Wherever she went
she had a sideways scuttle and also a frown
that could have been caused by pain or could have meant
empathy or concern. And somewhere down
in the folds of her dress she is said to conceal
a dagger that has poison on its steel.

85 The angel, perfectly well aware of all
these things, asked her where he should go to look
for Silence. Has she seen him? Does she recall
any of the places he visits? She took
a breath and answered, "Once, I'd have said the hall
of any Benedictine abbey. Or reading a book
in a library in the school where Pythagoras taught.
But in those places now, he wouldn't be caught

86 "dead. He didn't abandon them but they
abandoned him. And now he hangs out with thieves,
lovers sometimes, and even killers who may
skulk about with him at night. It grieves

me to tell you this. But I obey
angels when they command me. He even deceives
in the company of Treason and Murder—it's bitter
to report. I've seen him with a counterfeiter

87 “and all other kinds of low-lives. He has gone
over to the dark side, I am afraid,
and he seldom stays anywhere but he moves on
as if he were a criminal or had made
terrible enemies, hither, thither, and yon.
The only place I can think of where he has stayed
regularly is in Sleep's house where he's
often found at midnight, catching zees.”

88 She is not, perhaps, the most truthful figure in
or out of this world, and the angel knows this but
her words are plausible—and a feminine
trick is sometimes to leaven lies with what
is absolutely true. The mind will spin
in a fit of dizziness that makes you shut
your eyes as well as your ears. But I digress.
Does Michael believe her? The answer, in short, is yes.

89 And where is this house, you ask. In Araby
in a pleasant valley, far away from any
town, in the shade of a double mountain we
imagine decked with beeches, palms, and many
other kinds of trees. The intensity
of the sun's rays never penetrates, for when he
tries, the foliage blocks out much of the light
so that even at noon it's never very bright.

90 There in that valley a grotto opens (again?
another one?) with trailing ivy before
the entrance so that eyes of most of the men
who pass by never notice that there's a door.

Inside is the refuge of Sleep, or say his den,
in which Idleness, fat and lazy and likely to snore,
sits on one side, while on the other Sloth
lolls on the ground yawning. Along with both

91 of these companions, Forgetfulness stands guard.
He does not allow anyone in and doesn't
even recognize anyone. Staring hard
into their faces, he's blank, as if it wasn't
in his life where they met. His job is to ward
visitors off, and messages. It hasn't
happened if you don't know about it. No?
As far as Sleep is concerned, it is practically so.

92 The other figure watching over this very
literary scene is Silence, whose
capacious cloak of velvet (or maybe terry?)
is as quiet as he moves as the felt shoes
he always wears. His job is to be wary
of any intruders, and he will not excuse
disturbances even of the slightest kind,
and his finger is at his lips to warn and remind.

93 The angel sees him and comes as close as he can
to whisper into his ear and not offend
his delicate sensibilities. The plan
God has in mind is for Silence now to send
Rinaldo to Paris—but in a Stygian
quiet. The Moors must never apprehend
what's going on. Rumor must be restrained
and secrecy must somehow be maintained.

94 Silence answers . . . But wait a minute! He
does not say a word, which would undo
his purpose and entire being. We
must imagine rather a nod of the head to

indicate assent. He can agree
but not out loud, and thus the interview
concludes and Silence places himself behind
the angel and immediately they find

95 themselves in Picardy. What happens there
is beyond all explanation. Miracles are
by nature supernatural. And rare.
The angel moves the army which is far
from Paris to the capital city where
they can reinforce the brave army of Char-
lemagne. And he accomplishes this in one
day. Who can imagine how it was done?

96 Whatever it was, we must grant to Silence his
share of the credit, for he devises a cloud
that, even though elsewhere the weather is
beautiful, conceals in a misty shroud
Rinaldo's force as it's moving along, and this
is useful. The trumpets and drums, otherwise loud,
are, beyond the mist, entirely mute
no matter how loudly the trumpeters tweedle and toot.

97 And that isn't all he does. He casts a spell
or maybe he does it with something substantial, a powder
or possibly crystals, but surely it works well,
and renders the Pagans deaf no matter how loud or
strident the noises may be. They cannot tell
of what they cannot hear. It is also a clouder
of vision so that they are also blind
as the man in the saying who can't find his own behind.

98 All this time, while Rinaldo is making his way
at astonishing speed to Paris, King Agramant has
his army strategically placed in the faubourgs or, say,
the suburbs of Paris. And by the walls he does

what any assault requires and brings into play
the catapults and ladders so that his cause
is lacking for nothing in troops or materiel
and the prospects, he thinks, are that they will do very well.

99 It's a big army he's got. How big? I'm glad
you asked this question, inviting metaphor,
hyperbole, and the rest of the chiliar
of poetic devices that I am grateful for
the opportunity to display. If you had
an account of the number of waves that break on the shore
at the foot of Gibraltar over the course of a year
that number would not be as large as the army here.

100 Or count the number of stars in the sky at night
and let them be eyes looking down at lovers.
(Why not? This is embroidery. It's all right.)
That number would not be adequate, one discovers,
to compare with the army Agramant brings to the fight—
and that doesn't reckon the muleteers and drovers,
the cooks, and the rest of the ancillary crew.
We'll agree there were a lot of them. Will that do?

101 Inside the city, alarm bells go off here
and there, and the people, who are already alert,
are only worried further and filled with fear
of what is about to happen and how they'll be hurt
by the pagan hordes. At churches far and near
they congregate to pray to the inert
statues of saints to which they offer rings
and necklaces, gold, and jewelry, and things

102 of value in hopes these figures will provide
protection from the enemy. Their distress
they mutter as well to the corpses buried outside
and ask them to intercede for them and bless—

as if they have already been sanctified.
The old huddle together. Some confess
their sins. The young, however, run to the walls
displaying zeal and a recklessness that appalls.

103 But higher up the social scale we find
kings, dukes, paladins, barons, knights,
and foreign soldiers of every rank and kind
who are ready to die for Christ in the coming fights
to which they all look forward. Some are inclined
to begin the action, the prospect of which excites,
and they ask the emperor if he will not allow
that the drawbridges of Paris be lowered now.

104 The emperor is pleased that they are in high
spirits and he approves this splendid show
of valor, but he has a plan he is sticking by
and thinks what they are asking is *de trop*.
So he refuses them, not explaining why,
and sends them to their stations. Of course they go
because he is the emperor, and they
are therefore supposed to yield to him and obey.

105 He has it all worked out, with some assigned
to keeping the fires going and others tending
the war machines, while some remain behind
to serve as reinforcement troops, depending
on how the battle goes. And to remind
the various commanders, he keeps sending
messages here and there, and is always moving,
inspecting, encouraging, fixing, or improving.

106 Paris is on a plain at what you might call
the country's navel. The river Seine runs through it.
In the middle of the river there is a small
island, the best part of the town. And to it

one adds what's on both sides, which gives in all three parts of the city. If you could view it from up above, you'd see how its fortification exploits its geographical situation.

- 107 Agramant has considered this and chooses to attack just from the west so that his men will not be scattered. The supply route that he uses extends back to Spain and it is all Saracen. If Charlemagne, according to the news, is arming the whole circumference of Paris, then a concentrated attack at a given spot would be the way to exploit what advantage he's got.
- 108 There are chains across the Seine upstream and down, and arrow slits in the walls, and tunnels, and all the improvements for defense of a fortified town. But the greatest attention Charlemagne paid to the wall was where he expected the onslaught against his crown and kingdom. Agramant's range of choices was small. The son of Pepin could look out and see Ferrau, Isoliero, Serpentino, and . . . Oh,
- 109 that's Grandonio, is it not? And near are Falsirone and Balugante. Then Marsilio who has recently come here bringing from Spain many new armed men. Sobrino is next, with Puliano. They appear to be standing together, guarding the bank of the Seine. Then Dardinel of Altamonte, who's small beside the king of Oran (who is six cubits tall).
- 110 They maneuver this way and that in complicated patterns, and much faster than my quill pen seems to be going. Rodomonte has hesitated too long, I fear, and shouts and curses and then

cannot control himself. If only he'd waited,
how differently might the engagement have turned out. But men
do what they do, or he did, and may it be said
that, as birds swarm in ripe grapes overhead,

111 the others followed with a bloodcurdling roar
and attacked the walls. The Christians, of course, fought back
not only with swords and lances against the Moor
but also with stones and hot lead that stops in his track
a determined invader. Even the roof and the floor
of some of the towers they threw down, or they'd pour
boiling water that blinded the climbing men
for their helmets were of little use to them then.

112 And lime, and pitch, and sulfur, and blazing hoops
they hurled at the swarm of Saracens, who died
like flies but they kept coming, these brave troops,
but always falling back, and replacements tried
not to step on the pile of corpses (Oops!)
as they in turn climbed up against the side
of the tall wall. A ghastly thing, indeed,
but still they continued to climb and fall and bleed.

113 Rodomonte of Sarza, nevertheless,
pushes another division up to the wall.
He has Buraldo along with him and, yes,
Ormida from Marmonda. I also recall
Clarindo and Soridano are there, and I'd guess
the kings of Ceuta, Morocco, and the small
nation of Cosca. Their majesties all came
in order to earn their proper share of fame.

114 Rodomonte's banner shows, in red,
a lion (himself) with its mouth open wide
ready to be bridled. It may be said
that the lady with the tack who wants to ride

is Doralice (the daughter, as you've read,
of Stordilano) and his intended bride.
She is the one whom Rodomonte is
in love with more than his kingdom, more than his

115 very eyes. But what he does not know
is that she has been abducted and now
is in Mandricardo's power. Even so,
all of his deeds of valor are somehow
done for her sake and her approval, although
had he been aware, we must allow,
his frenzy would have only been the greater
and he'd have done now just what he did later.

116 A thousand ladders are set up and each
has two men on each rung, the lower pushing
the one above as high as he can reach
in the frantic and dangerous moment of their rushing
up to the Christians in order to make some breach
through which more Moors can enter the city, crushing
Charlemagne's defenses. And from the rear
Rodomonte instills even greater fear

117 by killing any who do not press ahead,
so they understand they might as well keep going
upward. Most of them wish not to join the dead
and look for a less well defended area, knowing
their chances might be better there. Instead,
Rodomonte, who scorns the idea of showing
any sign of fear, looks for the least
likely place—where his glory may be increased.

118 He is clad in a breastplate Nimrod his forebear,
who built the tower of Babel and sought to rule
the stars, had fashioned of dragon's hide to wear
in battle. And the shield and helmet? You'll

be pleased, I think, to be assured that they're also heirlooms—as well as his killing tool, Rodomonte's matching, unmatched sword that mighty Nimrod wielded against his Lord.

- 119 No less than Nimrod, that ancestor, is he arrogant and impatient, and does not pause to see if the walls be broken or the moats be deep or shallow, but, certain of his cause, plunges into the water impetuously, and it's up to his neck and rippling at his jaws. He wades up out of the ditch on the other side dripping with muck and water but also pride.
- 120 He hurtles like a wild boar through the reeds of our Mallea here on the bank of the Po, but unlike the boar that clears the path it needs through the vegetation, the obstacles that slow his progress are rocks and burning pitch. He speeds past slings and arrows, his shield held high as though it isn't only the wall but heaven too for which he has contempt as he bursts through.
- 121 No sooner is he on land than he finds a way to the scaffolds the French have erected there, and he moves along this convenient path to slay one man after another, with zest and glee, slicing open the top of a head to display the brains (or else it's a monk's tonsure that could be just a bit short). Arms and heads are flying as what remains of their damaged trunks are dying.
- 122 He throws away his shield, which he doesn't need, and with both hands he can use his sword to hit Duke Arnolfo first, and you'd think that he'd have defended himself rather better, but it

was sulfur fighting with fire, and hopeless. We'd wish we could find some reason to omit how the blade came down to cleave not only his head but most of the neck as well. And he fell dead.

123 He hardly has time to watch as he gives a new backhand stroke with the sword that kills Anselm, Oldrado, Spineloccio . . . and who else? Prando, I think. One can overwhelm in a narrow passage like that one quite a few fighters, it seems. The first two came from the realm of Flanders and the others from Normandy—their forwarding addresses were now elsewhere.

124 Orgehetto from the clan of Maganza? Cloven from guggle to zatch. And Andropono? Hurled down into the moat. Moschino? Stove in, his head crushed like a grapefruit. In this world the first had been a priest, and the other throve in taverns where fine wine in his goblet swirled. It is not wine in which they die but mere water—tasteless, secular, and clear.

125 Luigi from Provence he sliced in two. Arnaldo from Toulouse he killed. And then Oberto, Claudio, Hugo he pierced through the breast. And then he turned and struck again at Denis of Tours whom he at one stroke slew. And many other strong and eminent men I cannot begin to name. Odo, Gualtiero, Ambaldo, and Satallone, each a hero . . .

126 Behind Rodomonte many Saracens scramble up the ladders to overwhelm the few guards on the walls who are unwilling to gamble with their lives. They've fled, but there is more to do

at the inner wall to which the skimble-scamble
French are hurrying. There is a second ditch, too,
and the embankment that's before it is very steep
and the moat at the bottom seems exceedingly deep.

127 Now reinforcements come from inside the city
and they have arrows and lances and the great
height of the inner wall, so they're sitting pretty
as in relative safety they start to liquidate
a number of the oncoming banditti.
The fighting is hard. The attackers hesitate,
but Rodomonte encourages one and insults
another, until he gets the right results.

128 It's carnage on top of carnage, garnished with more
carnage, as he splits a head and grabs
another, cutting his neck. He's covered in gore
and still he hacks and parries and cuts and stabs.
Some of his countrymen hesitate before
the swarming French. These, angrily, he jabs
with a bare fist and they totter and fall down
into the water where, in their armor, they drown.

129 There are so many going into the ditch that the dead
begin to pile up, and the Saracens can cross
standing on corpses so each can keep his head
above the water's surface in the fosse.
And now Rodomonte, with strength that could be said
to be superhuman manages somehow to toss
himself over the ditch—it's thirty feet!—
and even contrive to land standing up. It's neat.

130 And here he is fearsome too, cutting the cloak
of this man and greaves of that, as if they were made
of pewter rather than steel. It's almost a joke.
Tree bark, maybe? Paper? Such is his blade

and strength that he does damage at every stroke.
But the French are not without resources and have laid
plans. They have cauldrons of pitch-soaked faggots, oil,
saltpeter and sulfur they have kept at the boil,

131 and hearing the signal given at last they drop
all these combustibles into the ditch and down
the wall, and this is more than enough to stop
the Saracen offensive. Now they drown
not in water but flame that rises up
everywhere with billowing smoke and the town
is filled with the stench of burning human flesh.
And the hungry tongues of fire spread as fresh

132 men are caught and are roasted alive. The fires,
separate at first, spread and join into one
single blaze. These individual pyres,
merged, are a terrifying phenomenon.
The flames do not brighten the day for the sun retires
into the smoke for darkness to overrun
not just the sequence of day and night but, worse,
the order, it would appear, of the universe.

133 How could it be worse? There are, all around,
explosions, as if there were thunder from which came
this filthy murderous lightning, and the sound
is like that of the end of the world, the same
terrifying growl we expect from the hound
of heaven pursuing sinners in the name
of divine justice. And the dreadful cries that you
hear, though mortal now, are eternal, too.

134 But worst of all, perhaps, there is the fact
that they blame their leader who rashly urged them on
and instilled in them the courage so they could act
like heroes—or fools. In pain, they call upon

his name with oaths and curses I will redact.
But pardon me, my lord. I see you yawn,
and I am weary myself. I think it best
to stop here, giving us all a chance to rest.

Canto Quintodecimo

- 1 In a battle, it is generally agreed
that winning is good, whether it be through skill
or dumb luck. And it's preferable to bleed
as little as possible. Less costly victories will
deserve even greater credit. One can succeed
at too great a cost taking a town or a hill,
and keeping most of one's forces alive, we've found,
enables the victor to hold the captured ground.
- 2 This, my lord, was what you did when you
dealt so well with the proud Venetian lion
when they had the Po from Francolino to
the river's mouth. Its roar, loud and defiant,
is nothing fearsome if you are there to do
what you did before. The enemy was dying,
but our own forces, valuable and brave,
you managed by smart strategy to save.
- 3 This is what the pagan did not know
how to do, for he urged his men ahead
and they ended up in that ditch suffering so.
Eleven thousand and twenty-eight were dead
in just a few minutes. Even as these things go,
this was a total catastrophe, it may be said.
The corpses were burnt to ash. When the fire finished
the enormous heap they had made was much diminished.

- 4 The only one who escapes from this ruin is he who started it, for Rodomonte lives. He hears the shrieks and the calls for help that we would find impossibly heartbreaking and gives a curse to heaven. (Such profanity need not appear, I think, in these narratives. Imagine the worst you can and multiply it by thousands, but whatever your answer, keep quiet.)
- 5 As it turns out, there's more going on that this rout has occasioned, for Agramant's clever plan is that while the French are struggling with his onslaught, there's a chance that the guards who man the gate will be reduced in numbers. This is not the case, however. The bartizan defense hasn't taken a single man away and Charlemagne has prepared well for this day.
- 6 To the gate, then, Agramant goes and with him are Bambirago, the King of Arzilla, and, yes, the dissolute Baliverzo, who's good at war but wicked in every other way, I confess. Corineo of Mulga. Prusione (before, I said he was from the Canaries; they are less well known as the Alvaracchie). Malabuferso. (The list could go on for pages, recto and verso.)
- 7 There are many other lords as well with men in arms, some of them well prepared and brave but others rather less courageous and when the call-up came they evidently gave no thought to what it was for, and these citizen-soldiers had not brought armor or weapons save the cudgel or the pitchfork that they had kept in case of thieves or brigands while they slept.

- 8 But swords and shields and helmets wouldn't have done
a thing to arm their hearts. And it's too late now
to try to train or equip them. Everyone
is what he is. And Agramant somehow
has to make do. He's surprised, however, to run
into Charlemagne himself who would allow
no one else at this crucial post and appears
in person among his troops, inspiring cheers.
- 9 King Salamon is with him, and the Dane
Ugiero, two Guidi and two Angelini too.
And Berlengerio among the main
supporters. Oh, and also Avolio who
is with Avino and Otto, and all will do
their utmost. But we shall let them all remain
poised there as we take a sip and swallow
and turn our attention now to a duke we'll follow.
- 10 I mean, of course, Astolfo. I cannot hold
him captive in the feathers of my quill.
He has been in exile, as I have told
you earlier, and burning desires fill
his breast to go back home. Now that the bold
Logistilla has triumphed, she says she will
send him home the quickest and fastest way.
He's hopeful and in a cheerful mood today.
- 11 A galley is prepared for him as good
as any that ever plowed the uncertain sea.
Logistilla still worries that it could
happen that Alcina might somehow be
able to harm Astolfo. Therefore the shrewd
sorceress takes the careful precautions that we
would approve, sending Andronica along
and Sofrosina. Their fleet is very strong,

- 12 and as far as the Persian Gulf the pair will go
with him. (They are, you remember, Fortitude
and Temperance, and they aren't just for show.)
The course they set is maybe not one that you'd
have chosen, keeping close to the coast by slow
stages past Scythia, India and the rude
Nabatean shore. For whatever it's worth,
she says this is much safer than going north.
- 13 Before she gives him permission to depart
she provides him with instructions far too long
and complex to record about the art
of sorcery and how to avoid the strong
spells that people with a wicked heart
may try to cast upon him. He'd get it wrong
if he tried to remember it all. So she gives him a book
he can keep by his side and into which he can look.
- 14 This clever volume comes with a complete
index that allows him to find at once
any particular subject, should he meet
one kind of spell or another. Only a dunce
would flip through the pages at random and in the heat
of the moment try to find the answer he hunts
for frantically. An index is of great use,
provided that the reader is not obtuse.
- 15 Along with the book she gives him another gift,
a horn that makes a truly dreadful sound
that causes everyone in earshot to lift
his hands to his ears and run away. The ground
trembles as in an earthquake when plates shift
and after the echo dies there's no one around
left to be a threat or even a minor
nuisance. No gift in history has been finer.

- 16 With many thanks, the Englishman says goodbye to the fairy and, with a favoring breeze, sails to the populous cities of India. He can descry the land where St. Thomas lived (so say the tales). The helmsman then turns north and to port they spy the Malacca peninsula. As the dawn pales they see the mouth of the Ganges and, moving on, find themselves drawing abeam of rich Ceylon.
- 17 They keep on keeping on until they reach Cochin, which is the gateway to the sea of Arabia (and has a pleasant beach). Astolfo asks Andronica if there be a passageway to Europe. And can she teach him whether it is possible that he could sail all the way to England or to France? She is entirely pleased to have the chance
- 18 to enlighten him. She explains how the waters come together and one touches the next—except that Neptune has forbidden shipping from one hemisphere to the other and has kept their realms apart. Of course, there have been some seamen, most courageous and adept, who've tried to do it, but always on one hand they see an apparently endless mass of land.
- 19 “Because of this,” she continues, “no ship goes from Europe into Asia or vice versa, but as the months and years roll by, who knows what new Argonauts will appear to defy the curse a god has made and find the way for those vessels to make the crossing and traverse a course across all these continuous seas to the Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Chinese.

- 20 “They will encircle Africa and find
new islands and new peoples, for the track
the sun takes every day is of the kind
that men can follow. Never going back,
they can arrive where they began. The mind
can conceive of this even now, and for the lack
of brave explorers there will be remedies,
men who will sail to the far antipodes.
- 21 “They will issue forth from the gates that Hercules
made at the straits of Gibraltar and proceed
just the way the sun does, and by these
exertions find new worlds that clearly need
improvement, as for instance the pieties
of Christianity. Did not the Savior bleed
for the sins of all mankind? That message is
intended for the whole world, which is his.
- 22 “I see on the remotest shores the Cross
erected for the benefit of souls,
and also beacons to prevent the loss
of shipping where there may be treacherous shoals.
I see the conquest of a teeming mass
of savages who, converted, join the rolls
of the civilized subjects of Aragon
whose loyalty to Charles they swear upon
- 23 “the Holy Bible. It has been God’s will
that these two parts of the world be kept apart
for six or seven centuries—until
there came an emperor with a pious heart,
the greatest since Augustus, who could fulfill
his plan to reunite the world and start
a grand new age when wisdom and justice would
rule everywhere for all of mankind’s good.

- 24 “From Austrian and Aragonese lines
I see the birth of just such a prince, and the crown
that he shall wear from his home upon the Rhine’s
bank will be like what Augustus wore, and down
through seven ages to emperors whose designs
controlled the entire world and whose renown
has lasted until now—for there should be
one fold, one shepherd for all humanity.
- 25 “So that these promulgated edicts may be
enacted, Almighty Providence will install
near Charles V his captains on land and sea.
Hernando Cortez, for one, to whom will fall
all of New Spain. And Christianity
will come to the new world, which is no small
achievement. But the glory of it is
Heaven’s at least as much as it is his.
- 26 “I also can foresee a warrior strong
and noble, Prospero Colonna. And
Alfonso of Pescara, unless I’m wrong,
will join him in causing the French to understand
that Italy cannot be purchased for a song
but will cost much in blood and treasure. This grand
trio of heroes will be completed by
Alfonso d’Avalos who rises high
- 27 “and faster than anyone could believe to become
at twenty-six the Emperor’s general,
entrusted with all powers (and then some)
to put the world entirely in his thrall.
He will be like a horse starting out from
the gate with such speed that he passes all
the others and whose bloodlines are so fine
that he has not tired at the finish line.

- 28 “The ancient empire over which Rome had sway
he will restore wherever he can go
by land or sea so that Europe will obey
and sun-burnt Africa will not say no
to his commands, for he shall win the day
in every battle. And he will have also
in his campaigns a very helpful friend,
Andrea Doria. He’ll be a godsend.
- 29 “Not even Pompey who drove the pirates off
surpassed Doria in courage and naval skill.
The power of Rome was offended but it could scoff
at the pirates’ nuisance. Doria has to fulfill
his mission by shrewdness and daring—and I doff
my hat to him. From the Nile to Gibraltar he will
make every shore and every seafarer quake
in fear, which is a form respect can take.
- 30 “With the help of these men Charles will accept the crown
of Italy where the doors have been opened wide
for him. And the glory for this and the renown
Doria shares with those who were on his side,
and arranges for Italy’s freedom up and down
the peninsula that he might well have tried
to keep for himself, as a lesser man would have done
in a show of vainglory it was his nature to shun.
- 31 “Such devotion to country deserves high praise,
higher than that which Julius Caesar earned
in France or Spain or your country, Britain. The haze
of glory Octavius had he would have spurned
or Antony’s for that matter. Their affrays
inflicted violence on their own people, which turned
the taste of all their accomplishments bitter indeed.
And this is a serious defect, you must concede.

- 32 “Those who try to subject their native land
to servility should blush when they hear the name
of Andrea Doria and think of all his grand
accomplishments. And Charles confirms his fame
by giving him Melfi, which is, you understand,
Apulia’s capital city. He does the same
for all who risk their lives in fighting for
the imperial cause in this protracted war.
- 33 “He will be the kind of emperor who
finds it more rewarding to bestow
others with cities (and even countries, too)
than he enjoys acquiring them, although
what he gives he also retains, if you
follow the logic of this. But still it is so
that he is a generous man and from him pour
honors and wealth to those who helped in the war.”
- 34 Thus did Andronica tell Astolfo of all
the victories Charles would be given one day by his
generals. Sofrosina, as you’ll recall,
was also there to be helpful. She certainly is—
adjusting not only the sails, which would be a small
task, but shifting the winds to facilitate this
journey and make the best progress they can.
Over the water the ships positively ran.
- 35 You know the Persian Gulf of course but are
you aware that it has another name,
the “Sinus Magorum”? The Magi who came from afar
toward Bethlehem with their gifts for the baby came
this way as they followed after that bright star.
But whatever you call it, the waters are the same,
and they entered here and berthed their ships in port,
safe from Alcina and members of her court.

- 36 His escorts now could leave him and return
to Logistilla, while he continued toward
England and home again. (And we all yearn
to see the familiar landscape that is, in a word,
the model for all landscape, although we learn
that much of the world is different—and we are bored
or even dismayed by the otherness that prevails
and we long for that beside which all else pales.)
- 37 Astolfo sets out from here by land and passes
through one woodland after another and over
mountain after mountain. (Geography classes
might map his route.) And valleys where he can discover
lions lurking, and dragons that live in crevasses,
and thieves. Oh, yes, like birds of prey they hover
waiting for the moment in which to descend,
having no idea whatever that he can defend
- 38 himself at any time by a trumpet blast
that will fill their hearts with terror so that they'll flee.
Not only the men but the beasts run, and quite fast,
when he blows that horn Logistilla said would be
convenient. One might say it's unsurpassed
as far as musical weapons go. But we
can stipulate that it was fine and dandy
and often on his journey came in handy.
- 39 He travels through Arabia Felix (Why
is it called that? Are they all happy there?
Or merely less unhappy judging by
those in the Deserta part? Do you care?)
This is where the phoenix is said to fly.
And it's rich in myrrh, and odors fill the air
of precious spices. Then he gets to the sea
where Pharaoh's army drowned, while Moses, free,

- 40 managed to get across. He reaches the Land of Heroes (this is Egypt) and the canal that Emperor Trajan built. It's very grand. And he's riding a horse along the littoral so fast it leaves no footprints in the sand, or grass, or even snow as it passes all other horses, of course, but wind as well, and even lightning (or so the legends tell).
- 41 The name of this singular animal? I am glad you ask. Of wind and fire he was bred. He had been Argalia's once, and he had no hay or grain for sustenance but was fed only on purest air, which isn't bad. His name? It's Rabican, as I should have said higher up in the stanza, but such odd news is wonderful, and it keeps. Still, *je m'en excuse*.
- 42 He gets to the Nile and there he sees a boat coming toward him swiftly. A hermit hails him from the deck and shouts to him (I quote): "Ahoy there. Listen, son, your journey fails and, indeed, your life will end on a sour note if you stay on that side of the river. A giant assails all travelers and none escapes alive. He flays them, eats their flesh, and thus can thrive.
- 43 "He does this not only for food but also fun, and the way it works is that he has a net under the sand and when he sees someone crossing it, he enmeshes them and they get caught in the trap. But the game is not yet done for he hauls them inside where the table is already set, and he eats their flesh and sucks out their marrow and brains. Only the bones are left, and these remains

- 44 “he flings out into the desert. With the human skins he decorates his ghastly dwelling, which is only six miles down the road. And few men, given the choice, would not take the route I’m telling you is safer. Unless you want your tomb in his ample guts, which is a most repelling idea, you must cross at once to the other side and give the giant a berth that is very wide.”
- 45 A normal, prudent person would take this advice, but Astolfo is a knight and his answer is that it would be neither honorable nor nice for him not to take the opportunity this giant’s presence offers. In a trice, his decision is made. He thanks the hermit for his warning but says he’ll go to the grisly den where the giant dwells who does such things to men.
- 46 Prudence he despises, and safety, too. He’d rather die than seem to avoid a fight. After all, a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do, and certainly this holds true for any knight. He puts his life and faith in God’s hands who will direct his weapons because his cause is right. After this trial by combat, he will then have made the road much safer for other men.
- 47 “And if I die, what is one life worth compared to all of those that I could save? This is what I was fated for from birth, and if I am killed, I’ll be content that I gave my best while I was living on the earth.” “Go in peace,” the hermit says with a wave that became the sign of the cross. “May God preserve you safely, for you have a lot of nerve.”

48 “And may he send the Angel Michael from
the highest realms to defend you. And I bless
your undertaking.” Hearing these words from
the hermit, the knight gives thanks, but I confess
more than his sword or the blessing, he takes some
comfort in the horn. Defenselessness
is always good on the other party’s part.
He waves to the hermit and now he is ready to start.

49 Between the river and the adjacent swamp
there is a path Astolfo is able to take,
and soon enough he sees the giant’s camp,
a solitary house, and he can make
out the decorations that a vamp-
ire would eschew. For heaven’s sake,
arms and legs, and skulls are hung about
everywhere. No surface is without

50 its ghastly trophies. Hunters sometimes do
this kind of thing with animal heads and skins,
lions and bears most of the time. But you
know what these are? Let me explain the ins
and outs of the game. These are the brave few
who gave him a good fight. (He always wins
but he hates it when it’s much too easy.) These
are tributes to the dead, then, if you please.

51 With bones everywhere and ditches full of blood,
it’s a bit off-putting. But Caligorant, who stands
at the door, is smiling broadly, for it is good
to see someone approaching. The demands
of his capacious stomach for fresh food
have not been met for months, and new viands
are exactly what he has been hoping for—
long pig tartare, with a sauce of blood and gore.

52 He leaves the house and runs to the swamp to be
behind the knight in order to herd him to
the net from which he'll struggle to get free,
but all in vain, for that's what they all do,
and none has succeeded. But the paladin, as we
all know, has been forewarned and this is his cue
to stop and put his magic horn to use,
profiting from the effect it can produce.

53 The horn does what it does and the giant is
altogether discombobulated.
He has lost his wits, and not incidentally his
eyes, and he runs about. He is agitated
and isn't thinking very clearly. This
is just what our Astolfo anticipated,
and he watches the giant's pitiful reaction
with amusement as well as relief and satisfaction,

54 as he staggers into the net which closes on
its owner and binds him tightly on the ground.
Astolfo draws his sword but then upon
second thought he cannot inflict a wound
on a helpless giant even of such brawn.
An action of that kind would not redound
to his credit for it simply isn't the right
thing to do if you're any kind of knight.

55 Even in revenge for those victims he
dispatched over the years, it isn't fair
to kill a man when he is unable to flee
or fight. One never wants to have to wear
the badge of cowardice—a quandary.
But while he thinks about it, I will share
the story of the net, which I suppose
none of my audience, hearers or readers, knows.

- 56 This is the very net that Vulcan made
of finest threads of steel, and with such art
that no one could untangle any braid
or pick the knots that held it together apart.
This is the one in which Venus and Mars laid.
(Lay, surely? No, no. One another! Start
paying attention. It's transitive. Use your head.)
But this is the net that caught those two in bed.
- 57 Well, okay, some of you may have known that bit,
but then it gets interesting. Few have heard
how Mercury stole the wonderful steel net
and took it up to the air to fly like a bird
where Chloris soars—then and even yet—
behind Aurora, scattering, as I've heard,
the roses and lilies the latter keeps in her robe. (Had
a poet toyed with this, it would be an aubade.)
- 58 So Mercury waits for her with the net and one
day he catches her as you might expect,
and after he or they have had their fun,
it goes to Anubus' temple for priests to protect
throughout the ages. Three millennia run
their course, and everything is quite correct
until Caligorant comes along. No wonder:
temples for him are simply places to plunder.
- 59 But the point, *messieurs dames*, is that this divine
net is the one the giant has been using.
As nets go, there is none in the world so fine
as this particular specimen. After choosing
not to kill him, Astolfo decides to twine
fasteners on his arms and feet while losing
little time. He binds the neck as well,
in case he struggles. (You can never tell.)

- 60 He extricates him from the rest and lets
him rise to his feet. But he is changed and now
is gentle as any gentlewoman's pets.
Astolfo takes him along to demonstrate how
the road is safe now. Every village gets
a look at him. (The exhibit is a wow.)
He also takes the net, which he thinks may
come in handy on another day.
- 61 He uses the giant then as a kind of valet
to carry his helmet and shield and other such
cumbersome paraphernalia (or do you say
vâlet, sounding the final T. It's much
preferred among those people who really may
have one, and it's a very classy touch).
At any rate, he carries stuff, and the crowd
express their awe and their admiration aloud.
- 62 How did the little guy take the giant as
his captive? It's a marvel, they all agree.
What skill, what courage that knight on horseback has!
From town to town it's always like this, as we
follow them all the way to Memphis which was
and is, I think, the locus of the three
pyramids out in the desert where one sees a
sphinx as well (or are they all in Giza?).
- 63 But never mind. It's close to Cairo where
there weren't as many people then, but still
eighteen thousand avenues were there
lined with three-story houses that could ill
accommodate the population. A fair
number slept in the streets—as people will
who have no choice. But in a very splendid
palace the sultan lived, as all his men did.

- 64 Fifteen thousand vassals he has, I read,
all of them ex-Christians, with their wives
and children. It is grandiose indeed,
and in the stables are horses he contrives
to breed and sometimes race at breakneck speed,
for such amusements fill imperial lives.
Astolfo does not visit for even a while
but wants to go to the delta of the Nile.
- 65 Not just to see the many mouths, but because
a famous thief lives there who cannot be
killed—he seems to violate the laws
of nature. A hundred thousand wounds, and he
is none the worse for wear. It gives one pause,
but to Astolfo it's opportunity,
another challenge, another chance to show
his valor and his strength. (Wouldn't you know!)
- 66 Orrilo is his name. He lives in a tower
at the mouth of the River Nile at Damietta where
he is able to check the ships at any hour
or the caravans that are arriving there.
It is said he was born of a fairy and his power
comes from her and the demon of the air
who was his father. But does Astolfo worry?
Good gracious, no. He goes there in a hurry.
- 67 When he gets there, it seems he has to wait
in line, for two other warriors are already
engaging him. Both are sons of the great
Oliver—Grifon, the white, and the very steady
Aquilant, the black. They cooperate
but it's all they can do to defend themselves. I said he
isn't hurt by wounds and, as they learn
this is, when you're fighting, a matter of concern.

- 68 Orrilo showed up for the fight, but his mount was not
the usual horse. Instead he rode a beast
that lives on both water and land and it has got
an enormous tail and likes to make a feast
of people. In other words and briefly, what
he rode was a crocodile. But it was deceased,
for the brothers had managed to kill it and it lay
stretched out on the sand, but still looking fierce that way.
- 69 The thief however, is not so easy. They slash
and stab and cut and hit him but to no
obvious effect. Orrilo's hash
remains unsettled, whatever they do to him. Go
cut off an arm or inflict a hideous gash
and he's like a big wax doll of himself and though
he's hurt, he picks up the limb and sticks it on
again, and the whole effect of the wound is gone.
- 70 It's fatiguing and it's frustrating. One cuts
down through the pate as far as the teeth, which would
kill anyone else. The other opens his guts
with a slash across the belly. But it's no good.
Orrilo merely laughs and then he shuts
the gashes up. There isn't even blood.
It's like quicksilver that shatters when it falls
but then reassembles itself into silver balls.
- 71 They even cut off his head, which mostly will slow
an opponent down, but this one, not at all.
He gropes around on the ground for a moment or so
and picks it up by the hair and with a small
neat gesture claps it back where it should go
on the open neck, from which it does not fall.
Fasteners? Glue? Nails? I couldn't begin
to guess. But it's there, and secure, and can even grin.

- 72 It's discouraging, but Grifon conceives a plan,
and the next time they manage to cut the head off, he throws
it into the river as far and as deep as he can
get it to go. And anyone would suppose
that that would work, but Orrilo, like some merman,
dives in, swims like a fish, and (How? God knows!)
finds it, puts it back on, and emerges to
continue the battle, wet but as good as new.
- 73 Watching this combat there are two women clad
in white and black—the cause of the confrontation.
These were the fairies who managed to take each lad
from the talons of two great raptors. Our narration
need not dwell on the details which can be had
elsewhere—how the birds on one very sad occasion
snatched the babes from their mother, Gismonda, and took
them far away. The fairies saved them, and look,
- 74 here they are, in the fight with Orrilo to do
what the fairy godmothers have asked them. But it gets late,
and the light is failing. It might be better to
continue the bout in the morning. The debate
is not very long, for all agree. They'll renew
when there is more light, for the coming of which they'll wait
with eagerness. Orrilo, therefore, goes
home and leaves the field to his two foes.
- 75 This gives the knights a chance at last to meet
one another. Astolfo knows the devices
of Aquilant and Grifon, and they greet
him with great respect—to be precise, as
the Baron of the Leopard, for at the seat
of power that is his soubriquet, as nice as
any you'll find. It comes from his blazon: it
has a leopard, argent and rere-regardant, on it.

- 76 They greet one another with evident friendliness and the women lead them off to a palace of theirs not at all far away, where in formal dress, maidens and squires show them to their chairs in a bower where a beautiful supper *al fresco* has been prepared. The group that cares for the horses takes them off to the stables where there is water and hay and for Rabican fresh air.
- 77 It's a lovely place with plashing fountains (what else do fountains do?) and flowering trees, one of which has a large enough trunk so that servants can tie the giant to it. Of these there are ten or so not only to feed him but also to guard him when everyone takes his ease so that all may sleep soundly and without fear of this prodigious creature they have here.
- 78 At table the food and wine are all first class and the servants come around all the time to pour astonishing wines and they keep refilling your glass. But the pleasure the guests take is even more intense from their conversation as they pass the time in civilized discourse. They explore the problem of Orrilo and what can be done by the two young men, or, indeed, by anyone.
- 79 Astolfo knows the answer, having read that singular book of charms, secrets, and spells. Orrilo can only be killed if, from his head, one plucks the one immortal hair that fells the creature for good and all. Easier said than done, for which is the right one? It is hell's own conundrum. Still, he has a plan for victory. And Astolfo will be the man

- 80 to achieve this. He announces, to great surprise
around the table, that he will volunteer
to assure them all that the wicked Orrilo dies
first thing in the morning. The guests give a cheer,
because, at least as it seems to untrained eyes,
the lads have not been doing well, and they fear
the morrow may be worse. The brothers as well
are pleased and relieved. It isn't a hard sell.
- 81 Morning breaks and Orrilo comes down to the plain
to resume the uneven battle, but he's quite willing
to face the duke instead. No need to explain.
It doesn't much matter to him whom he is killing.
Orrilo has a mace. The other's main
weapon's a sword, but he is not instilling
a great deal of fear in Orrilo, who does not care
where he is stricken except for that one hair.
- 82 Biff! Bang! Bam! The sword lops one
arm off and then the other. Then the duke hits
Orrilo's breastplate, and now he has begun
reducing the torso to ever smaller bits.
But after all this mayhem has been done,
Orrilo goes about picking up pieces. It's
getting nowhere, and those who are watching say
it isn't different or better than yesterday.
- 83 It is brutal work, like chopping kindling, but
he's making no progress. After a thousand blows
he delivers one to the neck, and the head is cut
clean off. Astolfo picks it up and goes
a little way back and removes the helmet. What
now? He holds the thing by the hair, I suppose,
and sneaks off to the Nile, leaving behind
Orrilo, searching for it, but deaf and blind.

- 84 But somehow he sensed that the duke had left and he jumped on his horse to pursue. He would have cried, “Stop! Come back!” But this was hard, you see, without a mouth. Even so he tried but could not produce a sound. He followed, and we must admire his horsemanship and how he could ride using only his legs for urging on his horse, because, remember, his arms were gone.
- 85 But Rabican is faster and in this race is clearly the winner. Astolfo looks at the hair and can’t tell which is the right one, in which case the only solution is cutting all that are there, among which the right one must be included. A mace would be tricky to employ in this affair, but he has a sword which is suited very nicely for cutting hair efficiently and precisely.
- 86 He holds the head by the nose and starts to cut or one might better say shave Orrilo’s head. Disgusting work it is, the duke thinks, but somebody’s got to do it. And as we said, one of those hairs is the right one—and then what happens? The face goes pale, and the body, dead, falls off the horse. The pieces no longer could reassemble themselves: he was dead for good.
- 87 He returned then to the ladies and the knights to let them know what had happened and also to see the macabre trophies—they were not pretty sights—of the head here and the torso there, and we can assume they had mixed feelings because the fight’s outcome was not what the brothers thought it would be. Astolfo had the glory for which they had hoped but it had not worked out that way.

- 88 The women were also ambivalent for they had set this task for Grifon and Aquilant to delay them and to keep them as far away from France as they could—because they did not want the death that had been foretold for them there. You may understand their fears, for the hierophant had been quite clear. They were safe outside of France, so that in their fight with Orrilo there was little chance
- 89 that anything bad would happen. But now? They could continue on to the war that was their goal—exactly what the women thought they should postpone as long as possible. This whole tale was unknown to Astolfo, whose motives were good, and he meant these young fellows well, but then the rôle we play in life is often beyond our own understanding, as these events have shown.
- 90 Now that Orrilo was dead, the castellan of Damietta let loose a carrier pigeon with news for Cairo (and others, elsewhere) that the man who'd done such evil was gone and people could use the road now and come to the port. They began to do this almost at once without fear that they'd lose their goods and their lives. It was a great relief after such a long time to be rid of the thief.
- 91 The duke, in as friendly a way as he could contrive, tells the noble youths that their chance one day will come to them, and when it does arrive, he is convinced that they will bear away victory and honor. They will thrive and prosper, he trusts. (What else can he say?) He encourages them, but this they hardly need, so eager are they to join the war and succeed.

- 92 Aquilant and Grifon take their leave
of their respective ladies, and it's off to France
with the duke, but on the way there, they conceive
of the notion of making a visit while they have the chance
to the Holy Land where God, as we all believe,
lived as a man and for our deliverance
died on the cross. They want whatever grace is
to be earned by a visit to these holy places.
- 93 There are two ways to go. One follows the coast
and is pleasant and easy. The other is direct
and crosses the desert. You would save at most
six days, but that is the road we would expect
these hardy souls to take. The best it can boast
is water and some scrub grass if one can detect
an oasis in the shimmers of heat that arise
not only to blind but sometimes to fool the eyes.
- 94 But it's not such a terrible plan as it may seem.
They've got that giant, remember, and he can haul
enormous amounts of supplies. He's a twenty-mule team
all by himself, and they can therefore take all
they could possibly need for the trip with this supreme
baggage master who makes the effort seem small.
After an uneventful journey they spied
in the distance the land where Jesus lived and died.
- 95 On entering Jerusalem they find
an old acquaintance, Sansonetto, who
was born in Mecca. Chivalrous and kind,
he had been baptized and converted to
our faith by Orlando. He had just designed
fortifications for Mt. Calvary, new
walls two miles in length. He greets the three
and offers them his hospitality.

- 96 The threat is from the Egyptian Caliph, of course,
and Sansonetto, Charlemagne's viceroy,
is in charge of the citadel as well as the force
of defenders of the city. It is with joy
that he welcomes the three knights and for them pours
beakers of wine. Seeing that he can employ
the giant in building his wall, Astolfo's gift
to him is Caligorant, who is able to lift
- 97 astonishing loads. He also gives him the net
to keep him docile. Sansonetto in turn
gives the duke a sword belt and a set
of golden spurs that come down, as we learn,
from St. George himself. But how did he then get
these handsome trinkets? This is what you earn
looting an ancient city. One can cop a
vast amount of loot in a place like Joppa.
- 98 The trio visits a monastery famous
for its odor of sanctity that not only purges
sins of the past we have committed that shame us
but even helps fight off the sinful urges
worse than those that formerly overcame us
and may recur tomorrow to submerge us.
Having done that, they visit the holy sights
on an itinerary for tourists or knights.
- 99 They visit the many churches there and see
the Via Dolorosa where our lord
walked on his way to death, places that we
have allowed to our great shame to fall to the sword
of the unholy Moors—while we continue to be
embroiled in these wars rather than, in concord,
fighting together to take back what is ours
and restore that sacred place to Christian powers.

- 100 Piety, penitence, and good resolutions all
fall by the wayside, however. A pilgrim from Greece
brings word to Grifon that causes him to fall
away from these splendid and lofty thoughts, for he's
in love with a beautiful woman whom we'll call
Orrigilla in whom all felicities
of face and form are united—except that she
is unfaithful and wicked in nature as she can be.
- 101 It can happen sometimes to beautiful women who take
the world for granted and think they can have whatever
they want, whenever they want it, for the sake
of their loveliness, and some of them, who are clever,
figure out how much difference it can make
if they smile and make a sweet moue. They are never
refused a thing, and spoiled, they go their way
on a path fresh strewn with primroses every day.
- 102 The last Grifon had seen of her was in
Constantinople where she was sick in bed
and fought with a violent fever that had been
afflicting her. The idea remains in his head
to see her again, but now, to his chagrin,
he hears that she's off to Antioch where she is said
to have taken a new lover. It would be a waste
to sleep alone, she explained, and not to her taste.
- 103 He is heartbroken, but also ashamed for he
and his brother have argued about this woman. He knows
that Aquilant is right, but it doesn't mean she
can simply be dislodged from his heart. I suppose
anyone who has ever been smitten can see
how it must have been a torment not to disclose
what he was feeling and thinking. What earthly use is
a brother's advice to a lover who makes excuses

- 104 for the woman he loves, no matter how wicked her ways.
The lover lies to himself and rejects the truth
from anyone else. Accusations turn to praise,
for he knows that the criticism is true, but youth
is headstrong, hopeful, hopeless, and the days
and nights stretch out. And the pain, like a bad tooth,
will not go away. One must in the end accede
not only to love but also to hunger and need.
- 105 He won't say a word but will go to Antioch where
he'll take her back and kill the impertinent man
who went off with her and believed they'd find safety there.
What terrible vengeance he will take! You can
imagine all sorts of mannerist things if you care
to do so. But since this canto first began
much time and many stanzas have passed and we
could use a bit of a rest—do you not agree?

Canto Sestodecimo

- 1 It's just a story, but let me explain to you
how stories are not mere inventions but
pieces of real life, some painfully true,
that we manipulate. You have to cut
and paste a little, but that doesn't mean what you do
is mere persiflage and rodomontade. It's not.
The terrible pain that only a lover can feel
is, as I can attest myself, quite real.
- 2 The man who is taken in a snare has no
cause to complain. Indeed, he may rejoice,
no matter how disdainful she be. Even so,
if he has placed his heart well and his choice

is noble, he may hold his head high and go proudly about in the world. In a confident voice he can praise his lady, his inspiration, and keep his faith in her. He has no cause to weep.

3 But the man who has made himself a servant to bright eyes, a pretty mouth, and a lovely head of hair under which is concealed a slut or shrew, lacking in all purity but instead replete with filth, unworthy, and untrue, his torments are worse. He wishes he were dead and suffers not only from love but also shame for himself and her whom he dare not even name.

4 This was the wretched situation in which Grifon found himself. He could see his mistake but was helplessly in love with the dreadful bitch who made his life a hell. He could not break the habit. The yearning, that irresistible itch was stronger than reason. Asleep as well as awake she was always in his mind, though he knew well that she was as wicked as any devil from hell.

5 Which brings us back to our story. Where was I? Grifon snuck out of the city and did not dare mention this, for his brother would vilify Orrigilla yet again and there would be no possible answer. So no goodbye, but out of town at once toward Rama from where he headed for Damascus and Antioch to redeem himself or become a laughingstock.

6 But on his way from Damascus he met the knight who'd taken Orrigilla away, and a fine pair they were, both self-indulgent, quite giddy of heart, and altogether malign.

Liars and traitors both, they were as right
for each other as are the flower and the vine
of a pretty but poison plant that looks as good
as any vegetation in the wood.

- 7 The knight's steed had a fine caparison
and with him were Orrigilla and a pair
of servants he kept so they could carry sun-
dry items like his shield and helmet. There
she was, in blue and gold, beyond comparison
(she always chose her wardrobe with great care).
They were on their way to Damascus where the king
was having a joust and banquet—a festive thing.
- 8 The woman was terrified because she knew
that Grifon might kill them both, but it was her
life she was concerned with. Her lover could do
little to save her (if it were to occur
to him to try). So what was a slut to do?
She knows how to lay. And lie. And would prefer
either of these to the likelihood of death.
As long as she had it, she figured she'd use her breath,
- 9 for Grifon, as she knew, was not very smart.
She and her paramour had talked this over
and, for such occasions, she had her lines by heart.
She jumped down and she ran to her former lover,
pretending to great joy (this is an art
in which she was adept), said what drove her
here was her longing for him. She thought she'd been
abandoned and had been pining for him in
- 10 utter wretchedness. She hugged him, kissed
his hands and face. And clung to him with such
fervor that the knight entirely missed
the point. He didn't trust her very much,

but this was pleasant to hear. Could he insist
on a more plausible story? To give a touch
of verisimilitude she went on saying
that from Nicosia, where he had been staying,

11 she thought he would return. And when she heard
he'd gone to Syria it nearly killed her.
She thought of suicide (and such absurd
claims she made with glistening tears that filled her
eyes and spilled on her cheeks). But having no word
from him she decided to follow him. She willed her
sickness away and got out of bed to seek
him here in the East, she said, stroking his cheek.

12 This is ridiculous blather but the coup
de gracelessness is how she mentions that
Fortune was kind to her and it came through
by sending her brother to her (By sending *what?*)
to escort her and protect her but also to
act as chaperone in order not
to risk her reputation for virtue. (Or
to advertise to the world that she's a whore!)

13 Can you believe this? I am afraid you can.
We know how women can be. And she was right
about Grifon's limitations. The stupid man
swallowed it all—even that the knight
was a brother she'd never mentioned. He began
to blame himself for her pathetic plight
and to hope she would forgive him. One admires
a girl who could make the evangelists look like liars.

14 He was a simpleton, but innocence
is not in itself a sin. One has the feeling
that sometimes one can speak in its defense
and even find there are ways in which it's appealing.

It cannot even imagine malevolence
and for trustworthy people the idea of lying or stealing
doesn't even arise. The knight is her brother?
Because she has said so. (Okay, tell us another.)

- 15 There's a tournament in Damascus: the king invites
men of all faiths to come and he guarantees
their safety. There will be feasting. There will be fights.
"Let's go together," Orrigilla asks. "Please!
I expect there will be all manner of delights."
Not only is Grifon not angry now, but he's
grateful to be included. Off they go
to the Damascene court. They make a fine tableau.
- 16 And we'll leave them there at least for a bit, for I
am thoroughly disgusted. This arrant whore
has had thousands of lovers. These numbers are not so high
as those at the walls of Paris, however, where more
than the sparks that arise from a fire are men who may die
as they struggle bravely in the thick fog of war.
Let us return to them. I'm sure that you can't
have forgotten the fight at the gate that Agramant
- 17 expected to be unguarded. But, surprise,
it is heavily manned and Charlemagne is there
himself with several other prominent guys—
two Guidos, two Angelinos and, if you care,
Angeliero, Avino, Avolio and, likewise,
Otto and Berlingiero—a pretty fair
representation of valor and skill, I suggest
(I'll stop here and not enumerate the rest).
- 18 The men on both sides want to look good because
their leaders are present. And military rewards
are likelier to be wrested from the jaws
of death when the gallant action is seen by lords

and generals whose approval and applause
are what they want. (But not to mince our words,
the Moors did not do well, carrying their
bravery to folly and then despair.)

- 19 A hail of arrows comes down from the wall or, no,
I mean it literally, as thick as hail-
stones in a summer storm they come, and, oh,
the shouts and groans merge into one long wail
that rises to the skies. But let us go
from their majesties for a while and focus the tale
on Rodomonte who is now inside the city
on a rampage that's impressive and not pretty.
- 20 You remember how he left those people dead
in the ditch, drowned or burnt between the first
and the second wall, my noble lord? I said
there was never such a spectacle, the worst
thing that one could imagine. This spirited
warrior leapt the ditch and, in a burst
of energy, the inner wall to land
inside the fortifications. It was grand,
- 21 unless you were inside, in which sad case
it was terrifying—a guy in a lizard suit?
The citizens flee, afraid he will give chase
into their houses and churches. Just to loot?
Or will he kill them all? Each hiding place
is crowded to overflowing and the pursuit
is frenzied and desperate. Doors are locked and barred
and those left outside scream and knock very hard.
- 22 He goes through the streets like a plague personified,
hacking off arms and legs and cleaving heads
from crown down to the buttocks so that each side
is exposed in a mirror image. An onlooker dreads

that this will happen to him and tries to hide,
but the doors are bolted of houses and even sheds.
Rodomonte thinks that it is quite
deplorable that none will stand and fight.

23 What the tiger does with sheep in Persia or
in India by the Ganges when blood lust
has possessed it is what Rodomante in war
does too. He is a savage wolf who has just
fallen on lambs and kids as, covered in gore,
he pursues the frightened Parisians whom I must
not describe as phalanxes. Do not laugh.
They are worthless rabble, merely, riff and raff.

24 All their wounds are therefore in the back
as they flee. On the street that leads to the St. Michel
bridge, there's a dense crowd through which he can hack,
killing several at every swing of his well-
bloodied blade. He keeps no particular track
of rank or age or gender, but pell-mell
levels saint and sinner, servant and lord,
criminal and judge with his dripping sword.

25 Not even religion can save them. Priests are cut
down with the rest, and smooth-cheeked little boys
and girls. It is universal carnage but
not even that satisfies him. He enjoys
ruining buildings as well that have been shut
to keep him out. Many of these he destroys
by setting them afire, and as you know
Parisian buildings are mostly wood, and so

26 they go up right away, and the fires spread
from one street to the next. The conflagration
is worse than what at Padua was said
to have been a model of urban despoliation.

In histories of architecture I've read,
six of each ten structures of that nation
were made of wood, so many of them burn down
at the hands of the man who wears Algiers' royal crown.

- 27 Fine houses go up. Churches are desecrated.
He takes a demoniac glee in these wanton deeds
that rival those of the Vandals we've always hated.
Sometimes just with his bare hands he succeeds
in pulling down walls as if they'd been detonated
and blown to bits. With him destruction speeds
from one arrondissement to the next to prepare
for Agramant who ought soon to be there.
- 28 Had that king pressed his advantage and broken through
it would have been the end of Charlemagne,
for the city would have been lost and his army, too.
But his chance was snatched from him by legerdemain
as Silence and the angel brought into view
Rinaldo with men to help in the campaign
from England and from Scotland. You must recall
that not so long ago I listed them all.
- 29 You will at least recall the miraculous way
in which the forces came to Paris from
wherever it was . . . Dover or Calais?
Shrewdly Rinaldo decided he would come
around to the left bank (or as they say,
the Rive Gauche), avoiding the troublesome
obstacles he would otherwise have to face
dislodging the infidels to save the place.
- 30 Six thousand archers under Edward's command
he has and more than two thousand horse who ride
for Harriman, Duke of Somerset. This band
he sends to open the gate of St. Martin wide

and also that of St. Denis, for he has planned each step in this undertaking and has tried many approaches in theory so that he knows just where each unit and man should be disposed.

- 31 A lot of it is logistics, wagons, machines,
temporary bridges over the Seine
that you use for the crossing and then by clever means
take up again. (The advantage of this is plain.)
Then, in one of those handsome martial scenes
that artists like to do of a campaign,
he has the squadrons form up so that they
can be urged on to perform at their best this day.
- 32 There is a dike along the river bank
raised high enough so that when he mounts it he
can be seen and heard by every file and rank
and he addresses them most earnestly:
“Raise your hands to God,” he says, “and thank
the heavens for bringing you here where you may be
honored above all men and nations for
your exertions today in this just and holy war.
- 33 “Raise the siege of these gates and you’ll save
not only one but two great princes, your king
to whom you are obligated and from whom you have
great love. But your exertions will also bring
deliverance to the emperor who is most brave,
most worthy, and most gracious. Do this thing
and you will free many other princes and
noble lords and knights from many a land.
- 34 “The Parisians of course will be your debtors, for they
will be grateful for saving their children and their wives,
the holy cloistered virgins who watch and pray
for a better world, and also their own lives.

Even their faith in Heaven on this day
will be reaffirmed, as Christianity thrives
and the vows they have made and very fervent prayers
are answered by a deity who cares.

35 “But beyond the Parisians and even the French there are
people here from every country and town
in Christendom who have come from near and far
and find themselves in danger now. Renown
shall be yours and in a different vernacular
men shall praise and thank you, up and down,
each one of us here who, as good Christians should,
risks his life in order to do good.

36 “If the men of ancient times gave a wreath to one
who saved a life, then how much greater glory
will each man earn today by what he has done
in saving the lives of such a multitude, for he
fights in a holy cause. Should any man run,
his cowardice will be a sad part of the story
of the fall not only of France but Germany too,
and Italy. Do not let that man be you!

37 “You fight for Christendom. You therefore fight
for him who chose to hang on a tree and for all
who believe in him. Each soldier, every knight
who is here must understand—the channel is small
that we rely on for protection. In spite
of that, the Moors have come from Gibraltar to call
on our islands in the past to rape and pillage
any defenseless city, town, or village.

38 “In the eyes of the Church, in the eyes of God we are
one, and we fight to help one another. It is
our sacred duty. Therefore let fear be far
from your hearts, but know that victory in this

engagement will be ours. We will win this war!
The enemy has no heart, no skill, and his
powers therefore are small while ours are strong.
The battle will not be difficult or long.”

39 With these and more and better reasons, he
stirred the hearts of the men. As the proverb says,
it was putting the spurs to a good horse running free
and fast already. It was, then, in a haze
of philopietistical esprit
that the army began to move in its ordered ways
in all but total silence. No one had cheered.
Nobody had to. It seemed a little weird.

40 Zerbino had the honor of being first
to strike the barbarians. He and the Irish go
in a large circle as they have all rehearsed
beforehand. In the middle of this tableau
the Duke of Lancaster’s forces, interspersed
mounted knights and archers, form up as though
they were toy soldiers a clever boy was able
to arrange in elegant patterns on his table.

41 His orders given, Rinaldo rides out in front
passing ahead of good Zerbino and all
the soldiers he’s leading, for there are those he’d want
to fight with—Sobrino, King of Garbo (a small
African country) and the King of Oran (I can’t
remember his name. Oh, yes, I now recall
it’s Marbalust!) They and their allies guard
that side of the field. (Until now, it hasn’t been hard.)

42 The archangel and Silence have been the aides
and guides of the Englishmen, but now they could
be heard—a growing noise like that of parades
approaching from the distance, or maybe you would

prefer a more natural metaphor. Cannonades of a summer thundershower would be a good comparison. Think of those first individual drops on the roof when, as we know, conversation stops.

- 43 Rinaldo spurs his charger and Bayard leaves the Scots at least a bowshot behind. His lance is in position pointing toward the enemy where it will surely find soft flesh and gushing blood as well as hard bone. This is the tempest that the wind has brought to the Moors. They do not yet retreat but their lances tremble like a field of wheat.
- 44 Their thighs quiver; their horses feeling that sign from their frightened riders are restless and paw the ground. Only Pulian, grim and saturnine, is unimpressed, for he has not yet found out that this is Rinaldo and, in a fine display of horsemanship that would astound us all if the outcome had been different, goes into a gallop and soon begins to close.
- 45 Pitta-pum, pitta-pum, the horse is gaining speed. Pulian touches his spurs to its flank to make it go even faster, while Amon's son (indeed, to call him a son of Mars would be no mistake) comes just as fast from the other direction. Heed his grace and skill, but it's power he has, to wake the dead as he approaches, an engine from hell or, better, we'll call it kingdom come.
- 46 They were matched in their aim, for each of their blows hit the other's helmet, but not in strength, for one passes the other, apparently not a bit hurt, but Pulian lies on the ground like a ton

of armor and meat. It may be the way one fit
the lance into its rest, or luck, or none
or all of these, but Rinaldo again succeeds
while on the ground the expiring Pulian bleeds.

47 The paladin regains his lance and then
proceeds to the king of Oran. You remember him
I trust, a truly enormous specimen,
strong as an ox and very nearly as dim.
Rinaldo's lance hits at his shield, but when
you think of it, that's high. The upper rim
is out of reach—assuming, of course, that you
are not a giant. (There are very few.)

48 As it turns out, the blow does what it should.
The rim of Oran's shield is steel but the rest
is not, and the lance pokes all the way through the wood
and cloth and hits below the giant's breast
making a little hole that is nonetheless good
enough for his soul's escape from its corporal nest
not in the heart but in the gut. His horse,
freed of his weight, is much relieved of course.

49 The fall of the giant has broken the shaft of the spear,
and Rinaldo turns Bayard to attack the foe
wherever they may be gathered most thickly, and here
he swings his bloody Fusberta to and fro.
Their armor is like glass, although less clear,
but it shatters into smithereens and is no
protection at all. He flails about to thresh
not wheat, I am afraid, but human flesh.

50 He is relentless. The blade seems not to stop
at anything—oak, leather, quilted cloth
are nothing. It is a cannibal's butcher shop,
and Rinaldo is fearsome when he's extremely wroth.

Miscellaneous body parts that drop
onto the ground in such profusion are both
exhilarating and disgusting. The battle's
background music is grunts and loud death rattles.

- 51 The van of the Moors is already routed by
the time Zerbino arrives with his advance
guard. In the fresh breeze his pennons fly
and horses at the gallop seem to prance.
They are wolves descending on a fold or sty
or, rather, lions. The sheep don't have a chance.
The space that lies between the forces closes
as one army meets the army it opposes.
- 52 There was never seen a more peculiar sight
on a battlefield. The Scottish forces struck
with energy and courage, but the fight
was hardly a contest. The pagans all seemed stuck
where they were, frozen in terror, as if they might
have been death's conscripts. The Scottish ran amok,
hotter than fire, while the Moors were cold as ice
as the Christians sent them on to their paradise.
- 53 There is only one Rinaldo but it appears
that every Christian soldier has such an arm
as his and is an object of their fears.
Trying at least to minimize the harm
to his troops, Sobrino, even before he hears
from headquarters, regroup. There's some alarm,
but mostly they perform the maneuver well,
better at least than others of whom I must tell.
- 54 Some of these were relatively brave,
the ones for instance whom Dardinello led,
and however little they had in strength, they gave,
but badly armed and trained, and barely fed,

they weren't exactly the troops a leader would crave
in his quest for glory. Still, he had on his head
a very pretty helmet with a crest,
and his armor shone as bright as the very best.

- 55 Isolier comes and Trasone the Duke of Mar,
and each force hopes to outdo the other. The first
as you know is in command of the troops from Navarre.
Their spirits are high. Let the enemy do their worst!
But Ariodante, it turns out, is not very far
away. He's the Duke of Albany now. There's a burst
of trumpet music and drum rolls and also the thwack
of bowstrings that are released and are snapping back.
- 56 Have you ever traveled up the Nile, far south,
all the way to the falls? It's something to see,
and worth the troublesome journey down from the mouth.
But there is the comparison that we
require for the noise: the shrieks, the uncouth
swearing, the blows, the groans—a cacophony
that, if you've heard it even once, remains
as long as you live, reechoing in your brains.
- 57 The sky grows dark as if a cloud were there
but the shadow is from arrows, dense overhead.
And the darkness is right and the thickness of the air
that covers both the living and the dead.
The armies maneuver, flowing here and there,
advancing and retreating. A man who has fled
now lies immobilized upon the dirt,
not far from the corpse of the man who inflicted his hurt.
- 58 A military man would mark the way
the forces ebb and flow. But a painter or
a poet might be interested in the stray
manifestations. Grass that was green before

turns red. And where blue flowers used to sway
there is the brown of horses and the gore
of crimson turning to garnet. Such distraction
is a refuge from the pain of describing the action.

59 Zerbino is doing well for a lad of his age,
destroying the pagans he finds on every side
and wounding and slaughtering them in a noble rage.
Ariodante also can take great pride
in how he gives proofs of his valor at every stage
of the fighting. The Spanish soldiers on a wide
arc of the front feel fear and even wonder
at how he comes and splits their ranks asunder.

60 Calabrun's bastard sons (there are two of these,
Mosco and Chelindo) and Calamidor
decide to win glory. Therefore, the Aragonese
and the one from Barcelona set out for
Zerbino, whom they will kill, if not with ease,
at least with dispatch, for three are surely more
than one. And they attack him with great speed,
but miss him, and instead they wound his steed.

61 Zerbino, of course, is furious and he
runs to avenge his poor dead horse. He grabs
Mosco first, a youth who will not see
old age, for Zerbino very deftly stabs
his side and he falls from his saddle insensibly,
as cold and white as figures carved on slabs.
Chelindo then (he is the bastard brother)
runs at Zerbino determined to make another

62 and better effort. But he has a great surprise
when Zerbino seizes the reins of his horse and gives
an astonishing blow to it between the eyes.
The horse goes down, for it no longer lives,

and its master, crushed underneath it, also dies,
as though it were one of Zerbino's prerogatives
to deal out death—or justice, if you like—
without the bother of even having to strike.

63 Calamidor sees this and runs away.
This is not good. Indeed, it's scary, and he
forgets about glory. He does not want to stay
a moment longer and he decides to flee
for his life, while Zerbino, to his great dismay,
calls out to him, "Coward! Turn and fight with me."
He strikes with his sword at the Spaniard's back—and misses,
but hits the horse on the croup and kills it. This is

64 a kind of biblical justice. An eye for an eye
and so forth, but Calamidor reacts
quite differently. On all fours now we can spy
him crawling along on the ground where he attracts
as little notice as possible, which is why
Duke Trasone or, rather, his horse exacts
the ultimate payment, trampling him. His blood
spurts out and slowly oozes into the mud.

65 Ariodante, meanwhile, is whirling his blade
this way and that as Artalico realizes
and Margano, too, for its broad passes made
deep cuts in each, although of unequal sizes.
But Etearco and Casimiro would trade
places with them in an instant, for their demises
were instantaneous. Lurcanio too
did well as he clobbered, slashed, impaled, and slew.

66 But do not suppose, my lord, that the rest of the field
was quiet or that the men who came along
following Lancaster thought to yield.
Rather, they pursued the Spanish throng,

fighting with the weapons they could wield
or even with bare hands, for they were strong,
the captains, knights, and also infantry
exploiting every opportunity.

- 67 In the van are Oldrado, the Duke of Gloucester, and Fieramont, Duke of York. With these two ride Ricardo of Warwick and Henry of Clarence, grand and bold warriors both. On the opposite side are Matalista and Follicon who stand with Baricondo. The first rules over wide Almeria, the second Granada, the third is lord of Majorca, an island of which you've heard.
- 68 For a long time the warriors seem even in how they are matched, and the tide of the battle goes back and forth as the metaphor I've given suggests, with the ocean wave that ebbs and flows in apparent equipoise but slowly heaven begins to favor one party (Why? God knows!), and the Moors get the worst of it in a growing flood that cannot be resisted or withstood.
- 69 The Duke of Gloucester unseats Matalista just as Fieramont knocks Follicon to the ground. It is a very gloomy vista for the Spaniards, who surrender thereupon. The Duke of Clarence no one can resist, a killing machine—and Baricondo is gone. What makes it worse is that these losses come almost at the same time: rum-tum-tum.
- 70 A moment like that can break the spirit. It did for the pagans who lost their nerve and began to retreat. On the other side, the Christian forces amid all that dreadful carnage took courage. The sweet

taste of victory hung in the air. Madrid
and all its grandeur seemed very distant. Their feet
took backward steps, but some of them turned and ran
which is, if you're fleeing, a rather better plan.

71 It would have been a total rout except
that Ferraù saw that the flank was giving way
and spurred his horse and, more important, kept
his wits about him in this sad display
of fear and failure. If he could intercept
those who were running, he might yet save the day.
Just as he arrives, Olimpio's head
is split in two and the man of Serra is dead.

72 Ferraù is disproportionately distressed,
for Olimpio was a sweet and gentle lad
who only came to war because he was pressed.
At court he entertained with songs and had
as beautiful a voice as was possessed
by anyone in Spain. He could make glad
the angriest or the saddest man at court,
and that innocent life was now cut brutally short.

73 More sorrow for this one poor youth than for
the thousands who also fell on this bloody day,
and Ferraù is beside himself and more
furious. He forthwith determines to slay
the one who did this. With an angry roar
he cuts through helmet, head, and all the way
down to the middle torso. He is split
like a broiling chicken ready for the spit.

74 But the rage is boiling in him still and he swings
his sword that breaks good helmets like eggshells,
and breastplates could as well be paper. He brings
death wherever he turns his gaze. He fells

two at a time and like a demon flings
their body parts in the air. The crowd dispels
and the Christians now are frightened and turn back
in the face of Ferraù's superhuman attack.

- 75 Agramant now enters the battle and he
is eager to kill many men and do such fine
deeds as to win great glory. With him we see
Baliverzo, Farurant, and in line
are Prusione, Soridano, and . . . Can it be?
Yes, it's Bambirago! This poem of mine
would be much longer if I included all
the names of the others, too many to recall.
- 76 This is regrettable, because they will
all pour their blood into a growing lake.
This is their last day on earth and still
their names are not worth mentioning. I take
responsibility, but I didn't kill
any of them. So let each of them make
his way around the tents with the King of Fez
to meet with the Irish, just as Agramant says.
- 77 The King of Fez is efficient and very quick
and his squadrons are soon in place at the river to meet
Agramant where the enemy troops are thick
on the ground. But they have not yet engaged when a fleet
messenger from Sobrino arrives in the nick
of time—that he needs help now or his defeat
is all but certain and that it will come soon—
in the late morning or early afternoon.
- 78 Agramant hurries there with half his force
or more, and the sound of their approach is enough
to terrify the Scots whose behavior is worse
than dreadful. Forgetting their honor and such stuff,

they now shift all their energy into reverse
and flee and thus avoid the prospect of rough
and tumble fighting with an enormous horde
of Spaniards coming at them with lance and sword.

79 The field is largely deserted except for a few—
Zerbino, Lurcanio, and Ariodante—
who have stood their ground unafraid and determined to do
whatever they can to restore the status quo ante.
Zerbino, you remember, is on foot, too,
and surely would have been killed, if you will grant a
poet the right to guess. But Rinaldo hears
of their difficulty and promptly he appears.

80 Rinaldo sees the Scots in their retreat
and shouts at them, “Wee sleekit cowran men,”
and other such traditional taunts. “Defeat
is not an option! Turn and fight again.
The son of your king is left alone in the heat
of a battle that’s one-sided. How can you then
flee like field mice? You came here for glory.
This is a different and very sorry story.”

81 From one of the squires Rinaldo seizes a lance
and with it rides toward Prusione, the king
of the Alvaracchie, but he has no chance
for Rinaldo strikes and after the loud ring
of metal on metal with its grim resonance,
he is unhorsed and killed. A dramatic thing,
but Rinaldo scarcely pauses. Quickly he swerves
to bring to Agricalt the death he deserves.

82 Then Bambirago he kills, and then he hits
and gravely wounds Soridano but the shaft
of his lance breaks into several useless bits.
Another tool is at hand for his strenuous craft

and he draws Fusberta from the scabbard and it's
strong enough to knock Serpentino abaft
and onto the ground. He would have done even more
except for the magic armor the Spaniard wore.

83 His arrival turns out to be very timely indeed,
for Zerbino's haggis surely would have been
otherwise cooked. Now he can find a steed.
(There are many of them, riderless, on the scene.)
Agramant comes up at this moment in
time with Dardinello, and also the keen
Sobrino and Balastro. But unimpressed
Rinaldo sends some of them to their final rest.

84 And then of course he turns on Agramant
who is fierce and strong and fights like a thousand men.
This is the important man one would want
to put to death and he charges on Bayard and then
as the horse bumps him strikes with his sword aslant,
and knocks down both the horse and his Saracen
rider. But now let us be after turning
to Rodomonte in Paris, looting and burning.

85 All by himself he's a riot, or worse than that,
a tornado that flattens whatever it happens to touch
as it goes its irresistible way, and what
it leaves behind is ruin and rubble such
as we seldom look upon. Charlemagne is at
the battle at the gate and there he is much
occupied, for Edward is just arriving
with Harriman so that there's hope of their surviving.

86 Things are looking up, but a breathless squire
appears. He can barely speak. "Alas, alas,
the news I bring is truly dreadful, sire.
Paris has fallen. A devil has brought to pass

a catastrophe here. The Holy Roman Empire is buried. Turn around and see what has been happening, the work of a single man from whom the people flee as fast as they can.”

- 87 The news is indeed shocking. One man alone is doing this? How can this possibly be? But the emperor turns around and sees with his own eyes the smoke that’s rising. There are shrieks that he can hear with his own ears! This is unknown in the long annals of warfare. Immediately he summons his troops together to lead them back into the city to make a counterattack.
- 88 The paladins and the warriors will meet in the public square—that is, if they can find it. They have a general sense of where each street is supposed to be, but the smoke makes anyone blind. It is treacherous, and now and then their feet feel the heat of the fire but do not mind it. They do what they have been ordered to do and rally in the square as the officers call out, “*Allez, allez!*”
- 89 There are signs of cruelty that ought to go down in history as a warning that never again should people have to suffer so. The town is littered with body parts, and women and men, or their corpses rather, are thick upon the ground. It’s truly depressing. My inclination then is to end the canto here. And I trust in you to want this splendid story to continue.

Canto Decimosettimo

- 1 A just God, when our sins have passed beyond
all possible remission, arranges for
wicked tyrants with whom he has a bond.
He uses them because they will do more
to impose the pains of penance and respond
to a sorry situation than those who adore
and worship him. This kind of anti-hero
explains and even justifies a Nero.
- 2 Tiberius too, and Marius and Sulla,
Domitian, Maximinus and the rest . . .
They weren't mere mistakes. You cannot pull a
cloth over God's eyes. (I do not jest.)
There must therefore be meaning we can cull, a
moral accounting to comfort the oppressed.
If Huns, and Goths, and Lombards come to visit,
do not despair, protest, or ask, "What is it?"
- 3 There is order in all this, a pattern of cause
and effect that brings Attila into being.
Wicked Ezzelino defied the laws
of Verona and Treviso—but we are seeing
the broader picture here and we must pause
to consider Heaven's purpose in decreeing
such suffering. The flock has gone astray?
He sends us wolves that prompt us to obey.
- 4 Evil rulers are worse than wolves for their
hungers are never satisfied. They feed
on flesh and treasure. Terror everywhere
flatters and delights them. In their greed

for blood they revel in death and do not care
whether there is justice or even need,
but delight in the power of their whims and madness
and bring to cities and whole nations sadness.

5 It is because of our sins, many and grievous,
that God afflicts us. Peoples worse than we
attack us, conquer us, and do not leave us
for generations. It may yet come to be
that the tables will turn and that they will perceive us
as instruments of heaven's stern decree,
condemning them for the wickedness that they
have wallowed in and for which they must pay.

6 The excesses of the time must have been grave
for God to have set the Turk and the Moor to prey
upon us, slaughter, rape, and to behave
as the scourges he required for the way
they'd lived, and to chastise and even save
their errant souls. But the very worst that they
had to endure was Rodomonte's rage
as he conducted his one-man rampage.

7 Charlemagne goes toward the public square
and on the way he sees corpses and parts
of corpses. It is one of those very rare
views of hell on earth. In anger he starts
to complain to his people, asking if everyone there
is a coward. Do they all have chickens' hearts?
What better refuge can they find if they
abandon their city and simply run away?

8 "Shall a single man enclosed here in these walls
from which he cannot escape do this to you
and not receive a single wound? It appalls
and disgusts me! Is there nothing you will do

to avenge yourselves? Are you all men without balls?”
Blazing with wrath and burning with shame too,
he comes at last into the great square
and finds the terrible Rodomonte there.

- 9 Many people had come there because the place
was strong and better built than most of the rest
of Paris, and it had fortifications in case
of attack, but Rodomonte was possessed
and swung his sword with a lethal kind of grace
while also flinging burning torches to test
the palace gates. The desperate throng fought back
in what they believed was a hopeless counterattack.
- 10 They fling down pieces of buildings, stones and beams,
furniture, columns, anything that they can
pry loose and throw at him. And if it seems
that they conspire with this dreadful man
who is laying the city waste, such sad extremes
are what fear drives men to. What he began
they finish as the panicked crowd consumes
the contents of fine houses and their heirlooms.
- 11 The King of Algiers is like a giant snake
that has shed its skin and, in its new one, shines
resplendent and revived to make
the animals it encounters of all kinds
either freeze in terror or else break
and run from the quick flickering of the tines
of its forked tongue and the fire in its eyes.
They do not think of saying proper good-byes.
- 12 No heavy beam or cross-bow bolt that's sent
to strike the Saracen from above appears
to affect him in any way or to prevent
his destruction in an instant of what took years

to build and acquire. A whole wall can be rent
and through the aperture Rodomonte peers
at victims who stare back and hold their breath
as anyone might when he sees the face of death.

13 From inside the houses come shrieks of women who run
through the spacious rooms and halls they've lived in for
years or all their lives—those lives are done,
and they say farewell to an armoire or a door
or perhaps to a canopied nuptial bed where one
night long ago they lay, but nevermore . . .
To such sad scenes of weeping widows and wives
the emperor with his barons now arrives.

14 Charlemagne turns to his barons to inquire
if they are the same men who fought by his side
at Aspramont where the level of risk was higher.
Angolant they killed in their strength and pride
and Troiano and Almont so as to inspire
respect and praise. “But apparently that tide
of manliness has ebbed a great deal from when
you faced bravely a hundred thousand men.

15 “Now there is only one of that tribe who destroys
our city. And what can he do to you that's worse
than death? Are you such frightened little boys?
Everyone dies. What's nasty and perverse
is dying badly, losing your nerve and poise
so that your names provoke contempt or a curse.
You have always fought for me and for my crown.
I never imagined that you would let me down.”

16 When he has finished speaking he lowers his spear
and spurs his charger against the Saracen.
Ogier moves also, and Namo, and here
are Oliver, Avino, Avolio, and then

Otto and Berlingerio appear
(they are always close together and, somehow, when
you see one, the other is there). *Sua sponte*
(that is, without a command), they strike Rodomonte.

- 17 But enough of this wretched violence. Let's turn away
from mayhem and killing and such depressing stuff.
Of burly wicked Saracens, I say—
and I think you will agree with me—enough!
Let me return to Grifon, if I may.
We left him at the gates of Damascus. (That guff
about her lover being her brother he
accepted and believed unreservedly.)
- 18 Damascus—a journey of seven days
from Jerusalem—is a splendid and populous city
in a fertile plain where busy farmers raise
their crops but even in winter it is pretty.
The hills to the east are convenient for the ways
they block the earliest rays of dawn a bit. He
who wishes to can sleep a little later,
which suits a sybaritic procrastinator.
- 19 Two rivers, crystal clear, run through the town
and their streams water many gardens there
and orchards and arbors from which come wafting down
a scent of oranges always in the air.
There are always flowers in bloom and from the brown
mulch green shoots arising all declare
a reign of fecund beauty and pleasant hours
of leisure in these rich, well-tended bowers.
- 20 The main street of the town is covered with cloth
of many vivid colors, like a long tent,
and the building walls are decorated on both
sides with sprays of flowers that are meant

to make one's passage delightful by their growth.
On windows and doors are hangings—the owners have spent
hours arranging these. Each tries to outdo
his neighbors in his efforts at pleasing you.

21 One can see people dancing and having fun.
Some ride horses through the thoroughfares,
impressively turned out, but everyone
looks happy and prosperous. Still, sometimes one stares
at the dazzling courtiers who, on their fine-spun
silks sport pearls and jewels such as one wears
to the fanciest balls and parties, but I daresay,
not in the afternoon and not everyday.

22 Grifon and his party were wandering through
this almost magical city when they met
a knight who had them dismount and led them to
his palace where he welcomed them and let
them bathe and have a nap and then in due
course come to a dinner—a grand fête—
with many courses and with much fine wine,
which surely is how anyone likes to dine.

23 At dinner the knight tells them that Norandino,
King of Damascus and Syria, has invited
foreigners and natives (for he could see no
sense in discrimination) who had been knighted
to come to a joust on the morrow. There would be no
reason to travel further that could be cited—
for here was a splendid chance to demonstrate
one's strength and valor and confidence in fate.

24 This was not perhaps what Grifon had planned
but any chance to display one's courage is good
and ought to be seized at once. We understand
that he was high-minded as any knight-errant should

be. He asked the knight, his host, if this grand festival was an annual thing or could it just have been devised as something to do for diversion and amusement, impromptu.

- 25 The knight replied with a story (what a surprise!) and told his guests, “These jousts will be held every four months, and their purpose is to memorialize how, on a certain day, the king, at the door of death, managed to save both himself and the prize of his heart, the fair Lucina.” He paused to pour a little more wine in the cup of each guest, and then continued his story. “Dear ladies and gentlemen,
- 26 “Lucina was the King of Cyprus’ daughter, and for many years King Norandino’s heart burned for her with a fire that no water could ever quench. They married, and at the start of their voyage home to Syria on a yacht or sloop or whatever it was, at a certain part of the treacherous crossing the party encountered a great storm. It was terrible weather or terrible fate.
- 27 “For three days and three nights we wandered around the Carpathian sea that blew us this way and that. Afraid of turning turtle or going aground we lived from wave to wave, uncertain what the boat could take. Finally the captain found a sheltered harbor he could put into at a pleasant piece of country with many fair valleys and hills—the answer to our prayer.
- 28 “We set up tents and stretched between the trees protective awnings beneath which we could cook and dine—not only tables and chairs, if you please, but carpets were spread on the ground to give a look

of comfort and civility, for these
were what the king wanted for her. He took
a party to hunt for game—a deer or a goat
to be cooked and served as part of the table d'hôte.

- 29 “But while he is gone, as we sit there taking our ease
we see, coming toward us, running along the shore,
a fearsome monster, approaching through the trees—
the Orco with a face one can only deplore.
Second hand knowledge is better by many degrees
than confronting him at first hand and with your
own eyes seeing him plain and up close. Where he
is, is just where you want not to be.
- 30 “Tall? Think of a tree that grows so high
you cannot see its top or hazard a guess.
He had a peculiar defect of the eye
so that two fungal knobs that more or less
resembled bone appeared there—God knows why.
As he approached it seemed, I do confess,
that a mountain was moving toward us, ugly and cruel,
with his breast befouled by vast amounts of drool.
- 31 “We watched him in growing horror and realized
that he was sniffing his way along the ground
as you sometimes see a dog do. We surmised
that he was totally blind, and yet we found
that this did not slow down the over-sized
creature, much larger and faster than any hound.
If one wanted to escape him, he would need
wings, I think, to achieve the required speed.
- 32 “We dispersed and ran for our lives. I believe there were ten
of the forty of us who swam back to the boat.
The rest he caught and he tucked a number of men
under his arm and some in the folds of his coat,

and yet more in the capacious pouch he then
was wearing as some shepherds do. Take note,
for as it turned out he was, in his odd way,
a shepherd—if not of the kind you see every day.

- 33 “The blind monster carried us to his cave
which was hollowed out of the rock beside the sea—
marble as white as the paper you might save
for important letters. This was the home that he
made with a woman whose face was very grave
and sorrowful, as one might expect it to be.
And women and girls of every age were there,
some of them ugly and others very fair.
- 34 “Above this grotto, there was at the cliff’s top
another cave, the fold where he kept his sheep,
a very large flock he could let out to crop
the grass up there. We learned he liked to keep
them just for pleasure. The wool or a mutton chop
were of no interest to him. Whether to weep
or laugh, I leave to you. But he preferred
human flesh to that of his ovine herd.
- 35 “He’d swallow down alive not just one but
two or three men at a time. He had locked
us in that upper cave and, from his hut,
he’d saunter to the place where he had stocked
his larder with us so he could fill his gut
whenever he felt peckish. And then he mocked
those of us who were left by playing an air
on the little flute he carried everywhere.
- 36 “The king, meanwhile, had returned from the hunt to see
the camp deserted. Emptiness. Silence. What
could have happened to everyone? Where could they be?
He went to the shore where they were about to put

out to sea. He signaled to them that he was still alive, and that they should not cut and run, but come back to him. He wanted explained what could have happened and what now obtained?

- 37 “They send a boat, of course, expecting to take him aboard to flee. They tell of the blind monster—the Orco. But they have made a mistake. He wants to stay. He is determined to find where it has gone in order that he can make it give him back his dear Lucina. His mind is made up, he says. He will win her back or die in the effort if that is fated. But he must try.
- 38 “There are tracks in the sand that he follows in great haste impelled by the fury of love, and soon he is there at the den into which we captives have all been placed. We are terrified, as you can imagine. Our hair prickles. Is the Orco back for a taste of several more of us? Does the bill of fare include me, each of us asks. And what is worst is that each of us hopes the others will go first.
- 39 “It is good luck that the king has, for he gets there when the Orco is out and his wife is at home. She tells him to flee at once and run anywhere. The king is grateful to her but he would risk hell’s fury to be with Lucina. He does not care whether he lives or dies. And a tear wells up in his eye as he thinks of her in danger. He asks for news from the sympathetic stranger.
- 40 “She reassures him then that the Orco’s diet is limited to males. ‘He discriminates and will not eat a female. He won’t try it! So there’s nothing to fear on her account. Her state’s

not enviable, but you need not disquiet
yourself. I often wonder why he hates
female flesh, which should be soft and tender
and ought to make for superior provender.

41 “But here they are, the many females he
has captured. He just collects and keeps them. I
can vouch for their safety, unless of course one be
so foolish as to want to escape or try
to get away from him. In that case she
will be buried alive, or chained and left to die
naked on the beach where the sun’s hot rays
will cook her to death. It often takes some days.

42 “The people he brought here today have not
yet been divided by gender but he will
eventually sniff them out, and what
awaits the women is safety, but he will kill
and devour the men. He likes to eat a lot
and sometimes it takes five or six to fill
his enormous maw. Therefore, you should be
content and, while you still can, you must flee.

43 “The Orco will be returning soon and he can
sniff out any living thing. A mouse
that darts along the floor he can catch. But a man?
They are large and very slow. And in this house
you’d never stand a chance. Forget your plan
and save yourself. Never mind your spouse.
If she indeed loves you, it is my hunch
she wouldn’t want you to be the Orco’s lunch.’

44 “The king replied that he was unwilling to turn
tail and run. He said he would rather die
close to her than live far away and burn
with shame and longing. His answer was one by

which he could not but win her approval and earn respect from her. She said that she would try to help him. There was a plan that she'd been making that might help in his daring undertaking.

- 45 “Around the house (outside, I'd hope) she had the carcasses of many goats and ewes for their meat and for their hides in which she clad the household—and she could use them in her ruse. She took the fat from a large ram (it smelled bad) and rubbed it on his body to confuse the Orco's sense of smell. It was quite rank. One might even go so far as to say it stank.
- 46 “But that was the point, and now she could have him don one of the shaggy pelts big enough to fit, and she had him get down on the dirt floor and crawl on his hands and knees till he'd got the knack of it. Then she conducted him to the cave upon the cliff top to wait for the Orco to admit what he would take for another sheep of his flock. The entrance of course was blocked by a huge rock.
- 47 “It's a plan. And Norandino waits as she tells him what to do. It's scary and boring both at the same time, but at length he hears the sound of the flute's notes that are pouring into the air. The flock obediently follows along. And in the king, those warring feelings are now resolved. Unless I'm in error, I'd assume that he was more inclined toward terror.
- 48 “This was, after all, a huge and ugly creature and to say the least inelegant in behavior. But however ghastly he was in every feature, Norandino's resolve was to be the savior

of sweet Lucina. Would he examine each or
just sniff at the flock? This conundrum gave your
hero here a moment of worry but
the Orco moved the rock away that had shut

- 49 “the cave, and Norandino snuck inside.
The Orco came over to us to hunt for a pair
he could have for supper, neither boiled nor fried
but raw human flesh. Remembering this my hair
horripilates and I tremble. I tried to hide—
but the monster was blind, and thus there was nowhere
out of his line of sight in which to conceal
oneself. He only went by smell and feel.
- 50 “When the Orco leaves, the king removes his fleece
and embraces his wife. He smells but she is glad
to see him. And also terrified that he’s
likely to die while she will be spared. ‘It was bad
enough to be captured, but still my heart took ease
in knowing that you’d escaped and that you had
the prospect of a long and happy life—
even without me as your devoted wife.
- 51 “‘I could have been mournful only for my own
fate, which is a common impulse, but
now, if I am not going to die alone,
I shall have deep regrets no matter what
happens—if you are killed before I’m gone
or the other way around.’ She wept a lot
and although he tried to soothe her, there could be no
comfort she could take from Norandino.
- 52 “No comfort, perhaps, but hope, for he confided
in her the plan of rescuing them all.
He could accomplish this, and he had decided
that not even to try would betray a small

dishonorable soul. But she must be guided in this by what he asked—which would appall her and the others, befouling themselves to smell and feel like sheep. It wasn't an easy sell.

- 53 “He taught us all the trick of deceiving the keen nose of the Orco, clothing ourselves in hide so that we might by inserting ourselves between real sheep have a chance to get outside. It wasn't a pleasant prospect, but we had been in a terrible fix, and many of us had died. So we found the oldest animals with the worst stench to them and these we butchered first.
- 54 “We covered our bodies with thick grease from the gut and put on the hides as he showed us. At last the dawn broke and we heard the flute. We knew that what would happen was starting and we were engaged upon a long-odds maneuver. We were terrified but there was no going back. The flock moved on toward the aperture of the cave, and one or two made it, and we could hope we might all get through.
- 55 “He patted us down and felt the shaggy fur that each was wearing and . . . let us go. It was an effort to keep silent because we were exhilarated and nervous. But because our lives depended on it and one would prefer not to be crunched alive in those savage jaws, we managed, and one by one, we all got past the entranceway. Lucina, of course, was last.
- 56 “She was less lucky, or say more fastidious and couldn't bring herself to smear the fat all over her body. She thought it was hideous. She put on the shaggy hide and left it at that.

The Orco touched her rump (lascivious?)
and she let out a shriek of disgust and outrage, whereat
he figured out that she was not a sheep
and he returned her to the cave to keep.

- 57 “We were looking out for ourselves, I’m very sorry
to say, but when I heard her cry out I turned
and saw what had happened. He had taken the hairy
skin from her body, and then she was interned
in that cave again, and we had to swallow our fury,
for sheep don’t speak, and he would at once have learned
that we had hidden ourselves among the flock—
either that, or the sheep had learned to talk.
- 58 “There was nothing to do but stay with the flock and spend
the day in their pleasant meadow. We waited until
the Orco lay down to nap at which point we could wend
our separate ways, some to a nearby hill
and some down to the shore where we could end
our unpleasant visit. But Norandino was still
there, determined to go back into the cave
for his dear Lucina, whom he was resolved to save.
- 59 “It was all he could do not to hurl himself at once
at the monster in a desperate attempt to hurt
or even kill the creature. But what he wants
is to free Lucina and keep her alive. Alert
to the greater likelihood that random events
may offer a better chance when he can divert
or outwit the powerful thing, he swallows his pride,
waits until dusk, and follows the flock inside.
- 60 “That evening, the Orco is even grumpier than
ever, for all his human flesh is gone,
and for this he blames Lucina. The stupid man
has no one else to blame—and she’s there alone.

He'll punish her then in the cruelest way he can think of, chained to a rock where she can atone for her part in this plot and, in the worst way, she can suffer, dying slowly of thirst.

- 61 “The king sees this, of course, but what can he do? He's leading the life of a sheep, waiting his chance to do whatever it takes, if only he knew what that could be. She signals to him with a glance and a shake of her head that he ought to run away to some safer place. The Orco's wife looks askance and tells him that what he wants to do is not possible and that surely he will be caught.
- 62 “It goes on this way for several days, and it's hard because the king is helpless and has to watch Lucina suffer while the monster keeps guard. But Devotion keeps him there, and Love which is much tested, but then there is help from Mandricard (Agrican's son) and King Gradasso, for such is his luck that these two should happen by. When good things occur, nobody questions why.
- 63 “Do they know who she is? But what does it matter? She is chained on the top of the hill, which is not good. They hack with their swords, manage to get her free, and take her down to the shore as any knight would. There they find her father, who's happy to see his daughter again. (That's easily understood.) Norandino is still up there with the sheep that are chewing their cuds while the Orco is asleep.
- 64 “But when they're let out, Norandino sees that Lucina is gone. The Orco's wife explains what happened to her. The king is happy at these tidings and swears that he will take great pains,

fight anyone, or pay, or say 'pretty please'
to get her back. All that now remains
is to wait until the giant lies down for his day-
time nap when Norandino can run away.

- 65 "This is not difficult, and yet he fears
that the monster may be following him. He goes
as fast as he can, then stops and thinks he hears
footsteps, but then runs on, and I suppose
that he keeps doing this until it appears
no one is chasing him. And soon he is close
to Adalia (it's in Turkey, a little blip
on the map) and there is able to board a ship.
- 66 "Three months ago, in Damascus, he arrived
and he sent out men to search in Cyprus and Rhodes,
in Turkey and Africa. Had she survived?
Yesterday he had news of her which bodes
well for him and the kingdom. She has thrived
and prospered. (Poets are surely composing odes.)
Delayed by contrary winds (and there can be a
lot of these), she is safe in Nicosia.
- 67 "It is to mark his joy at this good news
that he prepares this festival he will hold
every fourth month at the new moon both to amuse
but also in memory of his time in the fold
in the Orco's cave. He wants never to lose
the exhilaration he felt when he could behold
the minarets of Damascus again. At last
he had the sense that his tribulations were past.
- 68 "Much of these events I saw with my
own eyes, and the rest I heard first hand
from the king himself. Therefore you may rely
on every last detail, calends and

ides, as they say. The time of the sorrowing sigh
has given way to laughter. Now, understand
that if anyone says differently, tell him
he lies. Or is badly informed. Or simply dim.”

69 In such a way the gentleman laid out
the causes for the festival, and they agree
that the king is right in having such a bout.
That he'd observed the rules of chivalry
and courtly love no one could possibly doubt.
Grifon thanked the good knight and then he
and his party rose from the banquet table to go
to sleep, for the morrow would bring an exciting show.

70 A flourish of trumpets, a ruffle of drums (or is it
the other way around?). At any rate, there
is music and there are crowds intent on a visit
to see the horses and chariots in the square.
Grifon puts on that splendid armor of his—it
was made by the White Fairy, which isn't quite fair:
it gleams and is also enchanted and there is no fierce
knight who could ever dent it (never mind pierce).

71 And the one from Antioch, who was passing as
Orrigilla's brother, a poltroon
and coward of the very first water, has
also put on armor. Their host, as a boon,
has given them both a pair of lances because
the light spear and the heavier harpoon
both have their uses as you'll see if you watch
the mounted knights in any jousting match.

72 And the rest of the rig, including mounted squires
and squires on foot the knight provided, all
most skillful in their duties, and their attires
are splendid indeed. But they do not want to call

attention to themselves, so Grifon retires
to the side of the square in the shadow of a wall
where he can size up the other knights who show
by gewgaws they carry how their love-lives go.

- 73 The Syrians have weapons that are much
like those of western knights. Perhaps this is so
because the French were once in control of such
a sacred place as that in which we know
God in the flesh walked the streets we can touch
ourselves—but to our shame we have let it go
to the infidel dogs there who gloat and preen.
It is humiliating and obscene.
- 74 Think about it a moment. We lower the lance
against one another, Christians both, while we
should be uniting England, Spain, and France
and the Swiss and Germans in order to set free
Jerusalem, Christ's city. We could advance
together in brotherhood and harmony
instead of killing and looting here and there
among those whose religion we all share.
- 75 You call yourselves Most Christian and claim to be
Catholics, but what does that mean if you go on killing
your brothers in Christ? How can you not see
that Jerusalem waits, if only you are willing,
to be redeemed from the infidels that we
have allowed to seize it. We should all be spilling
the blood of the filthy Arabs and Turks who
occupy it and Constantinople, too.
- 76 O Spain, do you not have Africa nearby
that has harmed you more than Italy? And yet
you vex us (I cannot imagine why)
while the other and better cause you seem to forget.

And you, Italy, a pit of vice, a sty
of self-indulgence, how is it that you let
those peoples who were formerly your slaves
now rule as masters? Are you fools or knaves?

- 77 And you, Switzers, who huddle in caves, why
do you come down to Lombardy to gain
either bread or death when quite nearby
is all the wealth of the Turks who yet remain
in Europe? (Greece is in Europe, if maps that I
consult are not in error.) To their domain
apply yourselves, and you will prosper or
at least gain glory in such a righteous war.
- 78 And what do I say to the Germans? You, I believe,
are also looking for wealth and fame, are you not?
If you are alert, then, and always on the *qui vive*,
look at the riches Constantinople has got!
Pactolus' gold is waiting for you to achieve
a not very difficult victory over what
is a less well trained force than we're used to here,
and surely nothing for your fine troops to fear.
- 79 And finally you, great Leo, who bear the keys
of the heavenly kingdom, do not let Italy sleep
but rouse her. Your name is fierce and, if you please,
you can roar loudly and with a sound that will keep
the wolves away from your flock. God has given these
gifts to you for use. Your voice can sweep
our foes back to their lairs so that we may live
in the comforts that only peace and faith can give.
- 80 All this, I'm afraid, is rather a divagation
from what we were talking about a moment ago.
Let us return, if you will, to our narration.
Something was happening. Ah, yes, now I know!

I was saying how knights of the Syrian nation
wear armor like ours. I'm certain that this is so.
And all through the square in Damascus on display
were helmets and hauberks worn in the western way.

81 *Le tout* Damascus is there with ladies throwing
flowers from the stands to the jousters, while they
perform equestrian maneuvers, going
up in pesades and levades in a horse ballet.
Some do this well and for them the response is glowing,
while others are booed and laughed at—but that's the way
things happen when one's reach so much exceeds
one's grasp. (Nobody laughs at the handsome steeds.)

82 The prize of the tourney? Armor, a splendid suit
that a merchant found abandoned on the road,
a fine outfit it surely is, and to boot
the king has very generously bestowed
much gold and many gems to give the pursuit
of his grand prix a little extra goad.
Not that it needs this: the Syrian king
hasn't the slightest idea of the worth of the thing.

83 Had he any faint suspicion of what a great
treasure he had, he would not have offered it as
a prize for the jousting. But I anticipate.
Suffice it to say that, as splendid as it was,
he might perhaps have questioned this quirk of fate
by which such a thing could be abandoned. Does
it happen even in Syria every day
that a suit of armor like that gets thrown away?

84 We will, I promise you, sirs, return to this
subject a little later on. But let
us now continue with Grifon and speak of his
fortune there in Damascus, where they get

much action in bout after bout. Most prominent is a group of the king's favorites, an octet of noble youths, proficient in arms, who with lance and sword give all comers their sporting chance.

- 85 There are many broken lances, many deep cuts from sword or mace. The king can stop a bout if he chooses to do so or can keep it going if it is interesting or lopsided enough to make one laugh or weep. Martano, Orrigilla's lover, fop and coward, has attended. Otherwise he would have looked pathetic in her eyes.
- 86 He stands near Grifon looking on as two knights are fighting fiercely: one is the lord of Seleuca (he is a part of that crew of favorites of the king) and he wields a sword against Ombruno, a courteous gentleman who gets struck full in the face and, in a word, killed, which happens sometimes in these affairs, and there is a moment of grief everyone shares.
- 87 Had anyone been looking at Martano during these violent and sad events he would have seen the color drain from his face. He can no longer pretend to courage. It's just no good. He would much rather that every woman and man know that he is terrified than see this blood splashing out in startling crimson spurts. Never mind death, but a blow like that one hurts!
- 88 As a matter of fact, somebody was observing, for Grifon was standing next to him and could see how much the death had been unnerving for Martano, whose color was by no means good.

The brother was unimpressive and undeserving.
As if by accident, Grifon nudges him—you'd
have a hard time proving it wasn't—into
the way of a noble knight, to see what he'd do.

- 89 It's farce but not at all funny. He runs away,
and his horse's backing up one could excuse
as the animal's aberrant behavior, but say
what could any apologist possibly use
to justify Martano's performance that day
with his sword. It would be difficult to confuse
his demonstration of cowardice. The knight
terrifies him and he will not stand and fight.
- 90 Everyone laughs. Princes and nobles hoot
at what could pass as a clown's performance, but, no,
it isn't a joke or intended to be cute.
Martano is like a wolf when shepherds throw
rocks at it and it turns tail to scoot
in fear and retreat to its lair with head hung low.
An abysmal showing—and because Martano came
with Grifon, the latter feels befouled with shame.
- 91 Grifon's face is afire, and he would rather
be burnt alive in actual flames than here
where casual observers would probably gather
that he was like the one he'd been standing near—
for they came at the same time, and birds of a feather
tend to flock together. So it must appear
that he too is a coward and poltroon
unless he can prove the contrary, and soon.
- 92 What is needed, he is convinced, is a display
of strength and valor that should be striking and
altogether persuasive—like a ray
that streams from a lamp and in a darkened land

startles the blinking inhabitants who say
it is miraculous. But can he command
such a performance of himself? He can try
and the worst that can possibly happen is that he'll die.

93 Grifon sets his lance against his thigh
and urges his horse forward and up to speed
with the reins loose. He moves the lance to its high
and ready position to do its difficult deed.
It strikes the baron from Sidon as he goes by
and he falls to the ground which is not at all what he'd
been expected to do. The hushed crowd rises,
all of them wondering now what the next surprise is.

94 The shaft of the lance is left unbroken by
the blow and Grifon turns and strikes again—
this time it breaks in three pieces striking high
on the shield of the Laodicean lord, and when
it does he is driven backward and seems to lie
on his horse's cruppers resting briefly. But then
he straightens up and gripping his sword tightly
charges toward Grifon, yelling impolitely.

95 Grifon thinks his opponent is rather dim
and that if the blow of the lance wasn't enough
then he can clarify it some for him
with the sword that will let him know he isn't so tough.
With admirable dexterity and vim
Grifon strikes his temple a glancing cuff
and then a direct blow and a third, which is all
it takes to make his adversary fall.

96 Two brothers from Apamia, Corimbo and Tirse
who are used to winning at tourneys set upon
Grifon now. (They do not know by hearsay
that he is Oliver's son.) And they are gone,

the first knocked off his horse by the lance (I dare say it had never happened before), and the other one, still mounted, dispatched by blows of Grifon's sword, and it now seems likely that Grifon will win the award.

97 But now comes Salinterno, a very mighty pasha, the chamberlain who has great sway in the rule of the country. And in this day's fight, he thinks it disgraceful if someone from far away carries off the prize, which wouldn't be right. He is an excellent fighter himself, handicappers say. He shouts out a challenge to Grifon with threats and taunts, and it doesn't take long before he gets what he wants.

98 Grifon's reply is with a lance, the best and biggest that he has, and he takes aim at the other's shield, which it pierces at the breast and then comes out of his back. This is no game, for Salinterno has gone to eternal rest, which King Norandino thinks is a terrible shame, but everyone else is happy and full of relief, Salinterno having been a rapacious old thief.

99 It's turning now from a tournament to a rumble, and a pair from Damascus comes, Ermofilio, who directs the king's army and is not humble, and then Carmondo, the admiral. He too is proud of himself. Ah, but they both stumble, the general having been hit (though not run through) and the other at least able to blame his horse for not having been able to withstand the force

100 of Grifon's blow. There's one more left who cares enough to match his strength with the foreigner. He is the lord of Seleuca and he wears perfect armor. His horse is as fine as can be.

They charge at one another with their spears
aimed at each other's visors. Gallantry
cannot be better displayed, if I may suggest,
than it is with these two, fighting at their best.

101 In the first pass, Grifon gives the heavier blow
and the pagan's left foot is loosed from the stirrup.
They wheel and return and in this next pass go
at each other with swords. Grifon's strike would tear up
the armor of many another knight—although
it slices the pagan's shield in pieces, whereup-
on it lands on his thigh and there it would
have drawn blood if his armor were not so good.

102 At the same time the Seleucan hits
Grifon's visor which would have broken, had
it not been enchanted, into many bits.
His other blows are no more effective, for clad
in his wonderful magic mail that never gets
dented, he is safe. But the pagan's in bad
shape, his excellent outfit and harness in tatters,
and these, in jousting, are very serious matters.

103 Clearly, if this continues, it will end
in death for the Seleucan—unless the king
interferes and has the knights suspend
their battle, a very charitable thing
for him to do. He agrees to send
a herald to the combatants to bring
the fight to an end, as they are quite ready to do,
for no animosity motivates these two.

104 So where are we now? The entire roster is done—
the eight knights who had not held out for long
against the single challenger made one
wonder whom their opponents could fight, a strong

and willing group, but their adversaries are gone.
The brevity of the encounters was also wrong,
for this tournament was supposed to be a great
celebration, an entertaining fête.

- 105 It's supposed to go on all afternoon until
the banquet, but the sun is still high in the sky.
And what are people to do? And worse what will
they think? But then the king has an idea by
which they can continue. The eight who have still
to fight can divide themselves into two groups (why
not?) and fight one another, if there is respect
for the rank and title of each and all is correct.
- 106 Grifon, meanwhile, has gone back to his lodgings, mad
as hell at Martano's disgrace—even more than he
is proud of his own accomplishments. That bad,
base, and cowardly fellow dishonored all three
of them by his dreadful conduct. But still that cad
invents excuses, talks him around, and she,
Orrigilla, supports his outrageous claims.
Both of them are adepts at these sly games.
- 107 Does he believe them? Perhaps, and perhaps not.
He seems to accept what they're saying, and he keeps quiet.
He has formed a plan. He knows that they have got
to get out of town. Martano might cause a riot
if people recognize him after what
happened before. And evidently, they buy it.
So they sneak out through the gates as a thief would do.
It isn't at all what Grifon's accustomed to.
- 108 The exertions of the day have tired him out
and his horse is fatigued as well, and therefore he
announces that he needs to stop about
two miles from town. The other two agree.

There is an inn. (It's a well traveled route.)
Grifon locks his door with an iron key
and prepares for bed, taking off his armor and
his helmet, which we all can understand.

109 He sleeps like a plumber. A badger? A baby? One could
do many such comparisons, but take it
that he sleeps soundly. Meanwhile, up to no good,
the pair in the inn's garden are wide awake. It
is to conspire that they have met and we should
listen in, perhaps. Grifon sleeps naked—
and what Martano has in mind is to “play
a trick on him,” which puts it the nicest way.

110 The weird idea they have excogitated
is that Martano will take for himself the clothes
and armor and horse of Grifon and, much fêted,
appear before the king and all of those
who saw the tourney and, since then, have waited
to celebrate the triumph and, we suppose,
even claim the prize that went along
with winning. (Yes, I know, it's very wrong.)

111 They do this together, taking the armor and all
the rest—even the splendid milk-white steed—
and head back to the square where the last brawl
of the day is ending. The king, meanwhile, has decreed
that the knight be found at once who caused the fall
of so many gallant fighters. There is a need
to recognize him. It would be a shame
not to do this. And nobody knows his name!

112 And just at this moment Martano appears, the ass
wearing the hide of a lion (as in the fable).
The king is deceived and rises to embrace
the knight and tell him he is not at all able

to praise him enough. Great courage such as he has
must be everywhere proclaimed. He taps on the table
and orders the royal trumpeters to play
as he declares him the victor of the day.

- 113 “Martano” is the name Martano gives,
which is a little nugget of the truth
that liars like to use as additives.
The king extols the valor of this youth
and takes him to the palace where he lives
to give him the honors he deserves (forsooth!
and yea!) as one of jousting’s major stars,
the equal of Hercules or even Mars.
- 114 The fighting part was scary but this is fun,
and Martano and Orrigilla are most pleased
to be shown to elegant quarters where everyone
is happy to do their bidding, for they have seized
a marvelous moment. Grifon, asleep, is none
the wiser, but when he wakes . . . Is he being teased?
Where are his clothes? His armor? And of course
he wonders what have they done with his splendid horse!
- 115 Time and the little gray cells, they say, will catch
the criminal, and Grifon’s first thought is of those
two—Martano and Orrigilla. To snatch
his armor? Why would they do that? And his clothes?
He looks for them and they’re gone. Does blame attach
or is this just an odd coincidence? Those
happen sometimes. What clinches it, however,
is that Martano, who is not very clever,
- 116 has left his own outfit and horse behind. The host
of the inn confirms that the other man is gone
with the woman, and wearing lovely white armor, the most
handsome set he’s ever seen. Whereupon

the penny drops at last. This wasn't her lost
brother but her lover. He ought to have known!
How often had that woman betrayed him before?
How could he be gulled again by that whore?

117 Revenge of course, and vindication! But what
in God's name should he wear? The deep disgrace
of Martano's performance Grifon would rather not
put on with his armor and crest. But he must face
it—he can't ride to town in his underwear: that
would be even more disgraceful. This being the case,
he puts on Martano's suit, which doesn't quite
fit, and sets off in the guise of the cowardly knight.

118 He doesn't feel very good and neither do we,
who know how these little misunderstandings can make
difficulties. But it has to be said that he
is angrier at the moment than prudent. To take
a moderate view is beyond him, as we can see.
But there is the city looming ahead, and the ache
in his heart is severe. Hard by the gate is the castle
where the king keeps court with many a servant and vassal.

119 It's a complex of buildings with gardens and esplanades
and clearly there are rich apartments. The walls
are strong enough to resist the ambushades
of war, but in peace in the many sumptuous halls
there are places for banquets and feasts, as well as glades
through which to walk while listening to the calls
of the various birds that twitter in the trees,
and thus the lords and ladies take their ease.

120 The banquet today is on a balcony high
over the city with many pleasant views
of fields and orchards. There is still light in the sky,
and on the road that Grifon has to use

they see the armor and devices . . . Why on earth would *he* show up? If one can lose his honor, he should have the common sense to take himself immediately hence.

- 121 Giggles, chuckles, guffaws, and all the many kinds of laughter erupt at seeing who approaches the palace now. Aren't there any limits to his nerve? Well, one or two, as for instance in jousting contests when he just turns tail and runs. But what to do? King Norandino asks his honored guest who is this person approaching from the west.
- 122 More to the point, Norandino inquires how such a noble fellow as he's shown himself to be, a man whom he admires, could travel with such a companion who is known to be a coward? Is it that he desires a contrast that would be lacking if, alone, he went from triumph to triumph? He can appear all the braver beside this poltroon's fear.
- 123 "If he were not a friend of yours," he says, "I would cause him public distress. I hate cowardice in all the many ways it shows itself. But if it is his fate to go away unpunished, consider it praise for you, who brought him here. His debt is great not to myself but to you. It is for your sake that I am inclined today to give him a break."
- 124 Is it fear for his own skin or perverse delight in doing evil that motivates him? I cannot begin to guess because it is quite distressing. What he says to the king (why?)

Lord knows!) is that by chance he met this knight
on the road from Antioch, thus to deny
any but the most casual connection.
“I agree,” he says, “the fellow needs correction.

125 “Indeed, if only there’d been an opportune
moment, I should have punished him for his
timidity. And my hope is that quite soon
an occasion may arise for me to do this.
The conjunction was sufficient to impugn
my own honor, and it is because of this
that you’d be doing me a greater service
by punishing him who has shown the world his nerve is

126 “inadequate, shall we say? Hang him from some
battlement of the palace and let the crows
pick out his eyes so that travelers will come
to grasp what every nobleman here knows.
Make an example of this worthless scum
to other cowards whom we may suppose
could learn, as they consider his unsightly
corpse, not to hold onto their lives too tightly.”

127 Martano turns to Orrigilla who
nods and confirms every word he has said to the king,
vouching for him and saying it’s all true.
Norandino thinks it’s not quite a thing
deserving hanging, but what would be right to do
is arrange a little joke that perhaps may bring
amusement to the party. He summons one
of the barons and instructs him in the fun

128 he has in mind. With men in arms he goes
to the city gate to wait for Grifon and when
he shows up seize him. And this is what he does.
(It’s by surprise and he has many men.)

They hustle him off to a dungeon cell and close
the iron door, insulting him again
and again, and, in their taunts, they give him warning
that worse is going to happen tomorrow morning.

- 129 The sun is barely up and beginning to herd
the shadows from their lairs on the upper plateaus
when Martano decides it is to be much preferred
that he not wait around for long. Suppose
Grifon with an oratorical word
or two convinces the king . . . and then God knows
what his majesty might do to him.
His chances would range from none at all to slim.
- 130 A talented liar, he thinks up some excuse
for not lingering longer. The king regrets,
but gives him gifts and documents, the use
of which we will see later on. And then he lets
him go. But I promise you that there will be news
of him again. Do not take any bets
that he'll get away scot-free. Such evil must
be punished if the world—or poem—is just.
- 131 Grifon is pulled to the square in a rickety cart
drawn by two scrawny cows, as if he were being
led to the slaughter. The cattle stop and start
and the sizeable crowd laugh and jeer, seeing
the man they think is a craven knight with a heart
like that of a chicken. Taunting him and agreeing
with one another that this is the worst of men
they urge the cows when they falter to start again.
- 132 Little boys, bold whores, and shameless crones
revile him, or, even worse, blow kisses to
the man in the cart. The boys sometimes throw stones.
But laughter is mostly the gauntlet he moves through.

Behind the cart are the weapons Martano owns—
the emblems of disgrace that make a tattoo
as they bounce in the dirt rattling and banging
on the way to whatever it is. Perhaps, a hanging?

133 The cart stops before a platform where
a town crier is waiting to indict
him for faults and failures everyone there
already knows about in this cowardly knight.
The crowd is smug and venomous as they stare
at the man who is, although they don't know it, quite
innocent of these charges. They jeer and shout.
There is nothing Grifon can do but wait them out.

134 Then they tour the city to give all a chance
to add their repetitive insults and defame
the man in the cart. Everyone wants a glance
at the cowardly fellow who does not deserve the name
of "knight." A couple of fellows lower their pants
and moon him. After all, it is now a game.
Impassive, unexpressive, Grifon waits
until at last they reach the city gates.

135 There, they remove the leg irons and free
his hands. They haven't the slightest cause for concern.
But he takes the shield and the sword in hand and he
begins to give them the lesson they need to learn.
They are unarmed, after all. But I promise that we
shall in the following canto observe the turn
of the tables. This one, my Lord, has now gone on
for far too long, and much of the night is gone.

Canto Decimottavo

- 1 Most magnanimous Lord, my praises would
suit you more if they were delivered with better
polish, for though your tempered wisdom should
be celebrated, one must look through the letter
to the spirit of the stanza. My heart is good
and knows how all the city is your debtor.
You give every man who comes to you for relief
a hearing although not always belief.
- 2 How often have I seen you hear a complaint
with only one ear, keeping the other for
corrections in the portrait someone may paint
and wondering what he wants you to ignore
that may at least in part remove the taint
of the accusation. Meantime, you always wore
a look of keen and sympathetic attention,
an outward show of total comprehension.
- 3 Had Norandino been more like you are, he
would not have done to Grifon what he did.
You are renowned for justice and men see
how careful you always are lest—God forbid—
some wrong be done, and your reputation be
besmirched as his was then. Grifon, amid
the crowd, reversed that unfair judgment when he
slashed and skewered, killing very many.
- 4 Helter-skelter they flee, one here, one there,
some running into the fields, and some heading back
to town where at the gate, in their despair
and panic, many are crushed to death. The attack

continues, relentless. The sword whirls through the air
and for every insult he manages to hack
an arm off or a head, and in this wise
he gets them sincerely to apologize.

5 Of those who had reached the gate, the only concern
was personal safety: they raised the bridge which kept
out their fellow townsmen (let them learn
to run faster!). Those caught outside wept
and screamed and had no idea where to turn.
Some, even those who could not swim well, leapt
into the moat, where the water ran with the blood
of those whose speed or luck had not been good.

6 Grifon comes up to the gate where the cowards who
called him a coward cower, and with a stone
he smashes the brains of the first, but number two
he picks up by the chest and with a groan
of effort flings him over the wall. Who knew
that such a thing could happen? Having flown
like a bird but briefly the fellow drops into the square
eliciting gasps of horror from everyone there,

7 for if he could throw a person over the wall,
did that mean that he could also leap and then
bring death and ruin to them, one and all?
There was general panic and everywhere the men
were running to get weapons, while the call
of muezzins from the minarets again
and again added a spice to the to-do
and contributed to the general hullabaloo.

8 But let us leave them there, at least for a bit,
and return to Paris where Charlemagne in haste
is pursuing Rodomonte. Remember it?
All by himself he's managing to lay waste

the town and making people die in a fit
of fearsome wrath. But now the Moor is chased
by the emperor with Ogier and, not to
slight the others, Avolio and Otto.

- 9 Namoré as well, and Oliver and Avino
are there. And Berlingiero. Did I
forget to mention him? Ah, but I see no
reason not to get to the point and try
to show how in that scaly suit there could be no
way for the blows of lances hurled at him by
all these men together to penetrate
or hurt him, for its magic was so great.
- 10 They aren't alone. Angiolino, Guido,
Ricardo, Salamon, and then the traitor
Ganelon, and faithful Turpin (we do
not want to pass him over until later),
Ughetto, Ivo, and Marco of high degree (do
you not think so?). Matteo, one of the greater
soldiers from St. Michael's plain is found
near the Saracen whom these fighters surround.
- 11 But the worst they can do is what a strong wind does
to a mountain that just stands there and doesn't care.
(Have I thought to mention that Arimano was
present and Edward of Shrewsbury was there?)
And noisy? A castle wall when the wind has
reached gale force will seem to howl as the air
whistles by it. So the Saracen roared
in his thirst for blood as he waved his enormous sword.
- 12 The first he hits is Ughetto of Dordogne,
whom he stretches out on the ground split from crown
as far as the teeth, cutting through the bogne.
Rodomonte is hit but like a clown

doll he bounces up again. Like a stogne
with that dragon-skin armor, nothing can bring him down.
Or say he's an anvil someone is trying to hurt
with a needle or a pin that fastens his shirt.

13 They've abandoned the walls and ramparts and have come
to the square where there is clearly the greater need.
Most of them are terrified and some
are nearly senseless with shock, but they take heed
for the emperor is there. Equilibrium
is not altogether restored but at least the seed
of hope is planted and begins to sprout—
that they may yet survive this. But there is doubt.

14 Think of an aged lioness into whose cage
a sturdy bull is introduced. (It's cruel
but can be amusing.) The lion cubs at this stage
are unfamiliar with the beast and you'll
see them cower rather than try to engage
this huge thing with enormous horns and drool
hanging from its muzzle. What we see
are young lions that only wish they could flee.

15 But then the mother rouses herself and pounces
on the bullock and bites his ear so that blood flows
the sight of which is exciting and announces
to the spirit of the cubs what a lion knows
of courage in fighting and killing, which quickly trounces
the fears they had, and while one of the cubs goes
for the belly the other leaps up on the back
as they join their mother in a concerted attack.

16 So do the people of Paris take heart, seeing that
their emperor is among them, and they turn
against the Saracen, and they hurl spears or what-
ever can wound him slightly and make him burn

in indignation. Now arriving at
the square is a growing crowd that shares a stern
resolve to defend themselves. Of this massed force
Rodomonte kills and wounds many, of course,

- 17 but it is like cutting cabbages or any
other such domestic chore. It's just
tiring work, their number is so many.
For every man who falls down into the dust
five more appear to replace him. It is then he
begins to wonder how long his strength will last.
He's okay now, but he is breathing harder,
which rather dampens his confidence and ardor.
- 18 He decides that maybe he ought to think of a way
of extricating himself from this awkwardness.
In every direction are men, and yet he may
be able to cut a path for himself through the press
of people. It's messy and he has to slay
a lot of them, but then he must address
the British reinforcements Edward has brought,
fresh troops who have so far not even fought.
- 19 Think of a bull, a different one this time,
that has been penned in the square all day and young
children have teased and poked it without rhyme
or reason, and then it breaks out and runs among
the crowd in the street and suddenly all that prime
beef turns into a weapon. Some are flung
up into the air and some are gored . . .
That was Rodomonte and his sharp sword.
- 20 He cut off the heads of fifteen or twenty as though
he were pruning vines and lopping the weak
runners that sap the plant. But there was no
wine but only blood that came from this freak

viticulturist pantomime. His slow
but gory progress through the throng to seek
an egress left arms and heads strewn in the street
so that it hardly seemed to be a retreat.

21 But during this mayhem what he has in mind
is an exit strategy. Which is the best way out
of the city? For a while he is fighting blind,
but then he comes to where the Seine flows about
that island and there's a gap in the wall. To find
that place is now his goal, beyond all doubt,
but the crowd is thicker than ever and blocks his way
with more and more stupid bodies he has to slay.

22 I'm told that in the Numidian jungles they
go on tiger hunts and the brave beasts will
even when they are retreating make a display
of their strength and noble ferocity until
they have found a place of safety far away
from the hunting party that had wanted to kill
and make a trophy of them. Rodomonte too
retreating looked braver than most men ever do.

23 Indeed, for the sake of honor and to show
that he wasn't forced to go where he didn't want,
after he reached the river, he let them know
by three more forays into the city to taunt,
insult, and shame them, that he was by no
means beaten. Nevertheless, this deadly jaunt,
so tiring, could not go on forever,
and Rodomonte jumped into the river.

24 You're thinking you have me now because he's got
this armor on, but it might as well be cork
for he swims along with ease as if he is not
aware that this is odd. A piece of work

this fellow is. Phenomenal! But what bothers him when he crawls out of the dark water is that behind him, undestroyed, is much of Paris, and he is truly annoyed.

- 25 Should he go back to finish the job and leave no stone upon a stone or living creature in what was a great city? He's tempted to go, but he sees someone approach of familiar feature, the sight of whom settles his spirit, although we have to take a small detour here. Seat yourselves and pour more wine, for I promise we shall return to him in a minute (or two or three).
- 26 We have to go back to Discord, whom you'll recall Michael had ordered to stir up trouble among the men of Agramant's army and make them brawl with one another. She departed and flung herself into this, letting her duties fall to Fraud, who could surely harass the highly-strung friars and keep them on edge and at loggerheads, for whenever trust is gone suspicion spreads.
- 27 To enhance her power, she took her roommate Pride along with her because she knew the two could be even more effective side by side in whatever mischief they set out to do. Pride left as her deputy the snide Hypocrisy, who is certainly able, as you would guess, to incite among her victims a very catastrophic mood in the monastery.
- 28 So Discord and Pride set out and on the way they encounter Jealousy, traveling the same road toward the Saracen camp, and, if I may descend a bit, there was also a dwarf, whose name

we don't need here. He has been sent to lay
before Rodomonte (to Doralice's shame)
news of her relationship and how
it's different—she is with Mandricardo now.

- 29 You remember Doralice, I trust,
from Canto Quartodecimo. Her idea
was that the message might arouse both lust
and jealousy and pride, so the world would see a
display by Rodomonte of his just
and righteous anger. Surely, there would be a
deed of prowess and revenge to show
the world that the King of Sarza loved her so.
- 30 Jealousy, not surprisingly, had met
the dwarf on his way and joined him, for the two
had common interests and she thought she'd get
further in her business if he could do
his part. But now with Discord to abet
her schemes, she is delighted. They'll pursue
their quarry together now to gratify
Michael and all the other angels on high.
- 31 What she wants is to set King Agrican's son
Mandricardo and Rodomonte at odds.
She has abundant reasons to have the one
quarrel with the other. And she has prods
with which many other disputes may be begun
throughout the camp in the furtherance of God's
angel's instruction. With the dwarf, she converges
with Rodomonte just as he emerges.
- 32 Rodomonte knows the dwarf and his mood
changes at once, and gently, sweetly, he waits
to hear of his lady, expecting the news to be good
(although which of us can be sure that what the Fates

decree for us will be cheerful—that's understood).
Eager to hear whatever the dwarf relates,
he asks him what her message is and why
he has come. And is there need for some reply?

- 33 To this, the dwarf replies, "She is no more
your lady or mine but has become instead
the servant of another she can adore
more conveniently. This knight left dead
all of her people and took her with him—for
whatever purpose you can guess." The tread
of Jealousy is silent but swift, and she
embraces him, but not with lubricity.
- 34 Discord then took steel and a piece of flint
and struck them together into the tinder Pride
had already prepared, and soon the glint
of fire began to show and from inside
the Saracen this heat transformed the tint
of his complexion to crimson, while he sighed
and groaned, and as he stood there rolled his eyes
in menace to the earth and even the skies.
- 35 As the fiercest tiger returning to her lair
sniffs about and learns that her cubs are gone
and she cannot find them inside or anywhere
close by, she is filled with rage that comes upon
her with a fury. She does not notice that there
are mountains and rivers and hail is rattling on
the canopy of the jungle but she must slay
the robber who took her helpless darlings away.
- 36 So Rodomonte, in such a rage, dismisses
the dwarf and sets out. He does not wait around
for a horse to be made ready for him. This is
faster, as when a lizard crossing the ground

when the sun is blazing absolutely whizzes.
A horse, he has no doubt, can always be found,
and who will try to stop him from taking any
he likes or needs? Probably not many.

- 37 Discord looked at Pride and chuckled a bit,
for this was an opportunity to make
trouble and it had elegance and wit.
The only thing she had to do was take
somebody's horse away and arrange that it
should occasion a quarrel—for a horse's sake!
But let us leave them now and return again
to the progress of the Emperor Charlemagne.
- 38 After the Saracen left and the raging fire
was put out or under control, the emperor brought
the soldiers back to order, and his desire
was that they reinforce the troops who had fought
at the weaker spots in the line and might require
help. The rest, as he instructed, ought
to take the offensive against the Saracens in
whatever way would help the Christians win.
- 39 Through every gate from St. Germain to Saint
Victoire he sent them out: they should unite
at the gate of St. Marcel where every man
could earn eternal fame in the crucial fight
with the Saracens. To carry out his plan
he put the standard bearers out, the sight
of whom was the signal to start the general slaughter,
taking no prisoners and never giving quarter.
- 40 On the other side, King Agramant is up
and in the saddle again and with Zerbino,
fighting hard. Lurcanio does not stop
his efforts either (he is with Sobrino).

Rinaldo is facing an entire troop,
but with strength and luck, he charges, and they see no
way to hold their ground or stand and fight.
The single champion puts them all to flight.

41 The first foray is against the Spaniards who
have rallied about Marsilio's standard and seem
ready to fight. With infantry in due
order in the center and a team
of horse on either side, there's a tattoo
of drums and a flourish of loud trumpets that gleam
in the sun as Charlemagne urges on his men
to fight as if each one had the strength of ten.

42 The Saracen forces are starting to give way
and one would suppose that they were about to flee,
but King Grandonio comes to save the day
and also Falsiron (many times he
has been in far greater trouble, let me say).
Balugant and Serpentino, in no degree
inferior, show up as well with Ferrau
who calls out to the troops to destroy the foe:

43 "O brave and valiant men, my brothers in arms,
hold your ground. Stand fast. If only we do
our duty now the enemy that swarms
about us will be like cobwebs we can cut through.
Think of the honors and spoils that wait in harm's
way for us to gather up. Be true
to yourselves and you'll have victory and fame.
The alternative is defeat and endless shame."

44 Then, to set an example, he seized a lance
and came against Berlingiero who
was fighting against Largaliffa and a chance
blow of his sword had split his helmet in two.

Ferraù knocked him off his horse in an advance that took down eight more soldiers whom he slew with wild swings of his sharp sword that could not miss, it seemed, for each time it drew blood.

- 45 Elsewhere on the field, Rinaldo is killing pagans, more than I can list or even count, in a display both splendid and chilling of martial valor. Take it as a given. And Zerbino is his equal, ready and willing to do or die on the field that day to achieve an enviable glory. Lurcanio, too, is awesome. The three are really quite a crew.
- 46 One of them strikes Balastro and kills him dead; another splits Finadurro's helmet through. The first of these had been the one who led the army of Alzerbe. The other, as you may perhaps remember, rode at the head of the squadrons of Zamor and Saffi too, and also Morocco. Perhaps you may inquire were there no Africans for us to admire?
- 47 Dardinello, the king of Azumara, for one (he's Almont's son) with his lance threw Uberto down, and Claudio of the Forest, and when he was done Elio and Dulfino of great renown, and with his sword Anselmo of Stamford and none other than Pinamont of London town, and Raymond, too—two stunned by blows to the head, one wounded, and the remaining four quite dead.
- 48 For all of Dardinello's courage, he cannot keep the Saracen forces brave enough to wait for the Christian attack. You see we may be fewer in number but God gave

more valor to us, and skill as well, so that we are better man for man and they will cave in, fleeing—those from Ceuta and those of Morocco and Azumara. Their panic grows.

- 49 The islanders of the Canaries run away, and almost all from Alzerbe take off, even though Dardinello has ordered them to stay and tries to rally their spirits, addressing them so: “You cherish my father’s memory, you say, but you seem to be willing to leave me in danger and go to save your skins. I beg you to stand and fight. Do not dishonor yourselves! Do what is right!
- 50 “If you have love for me or can take joy in the freshness of my youth and vigor, stand and fight the Franks so they do not destroy our line forever! The hot African sand has toughened us. And now we must employ that hardiness that all of us have earned. You cannot flee, for all the roads that lead home will be closed to you. You must succeed
- 51 “now or you shall be harried and one by one picked off and killed. Better to die here than in profound disgrace and on the run. Our best hope is to stand and persevere together. They are, when all is said and done, as mortal as any of us. Conquer your fear and then conquer them!” Thus, he put it bluntly and proved his point by killing the Count of Huntley.
- 52 At the mention of the great Almont the men took heart and the thought occurred to them that swords and hands were better than backs for defense, and then they turned to face the enemy. One of our lords,

William of Burnwich, was nearly six foot ten,
at least a head taller, in other words.
Dardinello pruned him back to size,
lopped off that head and caused his abrupt demise.

53 But Dardinello's bloodlust was hardly sated.
He turned at once to the Cornish Aramon
whom he confronted and decapitated.
Almost at once his brother appeared upon
the scene, but Dardinello hardly waited
before he gutted the brother—and he was gone.
Bogio of Vergale he skewered too.
(He'd promised his wife he'd return, but what can you do?)

54 But you begin to see the pattern here.
Lurcanio approached, who'd pierced the throat
of Dorchin and then to Gardo dealt a severe
blow that split his skull. He also smote
Alteo who had been Dardinello's dear
friend. He'd tried to flee to some remote
part of the field, but Lurcanio sped
after him, caught him, and then left him dead.

55 Dardinello took up his lance to extract
sweet vengeance and he asked his Mohammedan God
to let him kill Lurcanio. He made a pact:
he would hang his empty armor on the façade
of some grand mosque. Saying this, he attacked
and his horse cantered across the chewed-up sod
until he reached Lurcanio and struck him so
that the lance ran all the way through him at the blow.

56 So where is Ariodante, you ask, his brother?
Will he not try to seek revenge in turn
by killing Dardinello, one life for another?
Dardinello is able to discern

that this is not unlikely, and he would rather meet him in battle and by confrontation earn even greater glory, but they both find that their way is blocked, both forward and behind.

- 57 Ariodante pushes, shoves, and slashes whoever gets in his way or holds him back, and Dardinello, making slow progress, gnashes his teeth and roars in eagerness to attack. One is killing Moors. The other smashes the skulls of Scots and gives a lethal thwack to French and English and, doing this, reduces live men to corpses oozing their vital juices.
- 58 They seek one another all that day but in vain, for they never manage to meet—it is Fortune’s plan to save for another the honor of having slain Dardinello, and there’s no way for a man to avoid his fate. See, even now, on the plain Rinaldo is approaching, for only he can undo the charms that until now have protected Dardinello’s life (but he’s not affected).
- 59 But enough of this. Let us now turn our eyes back to the East and Grifon’s demonstration that Norandino’s judgment was in some wise inaccurate. His spree of devastation and death refuted all those dreadful lies Martano told about him. In consternation King Norandino, distressed by the people’s fears, rushes toward the tumult that he hears.
- 60 He and a guard of a thousand men arrive at the gate, which is closed, but he sees on the other side the terrified subjects (those who are still alive) and he orders that the gate be opened wide.

Grifon, meanwhile, in order to survive
a counterattack, has deigned to cover his hide
with the armor Martano wore when he was disgraced.
It's better than nothing. He gets it buckled and laced.

- 61 There is a well-walled temple with a ditch
surrounding it at the end of a bridge over
the city moat, and it is a place in which
Grifon can improvise defensive cover
in a corner or perhaps in a prayer niche.
He hears the troops approach. He does not move or
show that he is in any way afraid
even of these long odds their numbers have made.
- 62 From this place of relative safety he can meet
them on the ground and kill a number of men,
after which he can, for a while, retreat,
wait a bit, and then go out again.
Each venture of his results in the defeat
of more of the king's forces with nine or ten
more corpses scattered upon the bloodied ground.
(This can be discouraging, I have found.)
- 63 The forehand is terrific, but one might expect
proficiency there. It's the backhand swing that does
work even more impressive for he can connect
on both sides with fatalities because
of his accuracy and strength. But we can detect
that each foray takes a bit more effort. He has
mortal limits after all. We descry
that he's hit in the shoulder and then again in the thigh.
- 64 It doesn't always happen but there are times
when Virtue can come to the aid of those she chooses
and thinks deserving. For all those terrible crimes
that Norandino judged him guilty, excuses

are otiose now. In the records of prose or rhymes
no one but Hector gets such credit. Abuses
of justice can happen, but the king now puts things right
and pardons this clearly brave and excellent knight.

65 Imagine what he thinks as he draws near
this Horatius at the bridge with a pile
of corpses as his trophies. Guilty of fear?
Clearly not! He displays a certain style
as he orders his troops to put up their swords, and here
he walks alone, his only weapon a smile
and, as all about are listening, in a strong
voice calls out to Grifon, "I was wrong.

66 "You have proved to me and the world that you
are no coward, and I admit my error
and beg your pardon, as I grant pardon, too.
Had I suspected that your accuser could swear or
defile his honor as he was so eager to do,
I'd have been more deliberative and fairer.
All I can do now I am afraid is to make
it up to you with gold or whatever you'll take.

67 "My ignorance and foolishness are great
and only surpassed by your demonstration today
of valor. I should be happy to compensate
you for that disgrace that in no way
was appropriate or just. It is better late
than not at all. May I perhaps convey
a town or two or even a city to you?
Or even half the kingdom, if that would do?

68 "Along with that, if you will accept it, I give
my heart to you for your great demonstration
of grace and forgiveness. I shall, as long as I live,
try to be just in that deliberation

that is the task of kings. This reparative gesture—the offer of even half the nation—would bind us both as brothers you understand. As a pledge I offer mine, and ask your hand.”

- 69 Hearing these words and watching as the king approaches, Grifon puts down his sword and his ire and embraces Norandino’s knees. (Such a thing signifies respect as well as desire to please.) But in the instant, and noticing Grifon’s wounds, the king directs his entire attention to taking care of the man who is needing immediate medical help, for he is bleeding.
- 70 He is borne into the city and put to bed in a suite in the palace where he of course remains for several days. We’ll leave him there and, instead, return to his brother Aquilant who maintains his search with Astolfo in Palestine. (I have said something about this before.) They rack their brains trying to find him among the holy places and look about for any clues or traces.
- 71 Neither has any idea of where to begin to look for Grifon, but by happenstance they meet that pilgrim (he gets a mention in Canto *Quintodecimo*). By chance he knew of Orrigilla living in sin with a knight. He wouldn’t call it a romance. They were on their way to Antioch and he gives their reason—that is where the new lover lives.
- 72 Aquilant inquires whether he told Grifon of any of this. And, yes, he did. The trail turns out then not to be so cold. They know where he went and why—for pride and id.

Aquilant can understand the hold
that woman has on him. And there amid
the desert sands he asks if the duke will delay
his trip to France and home to another day.

73 He went to Jaffa to take a ship, which would be
faster, he thought, than travel overland
to Antioch, and a vessel was going to sea
that very day. He embarked and, as he'd planned,
they made good progress, with Tyre on the lee
and Zarephath (now Saffet, you understand).
The winds were fresh and soon they passed Beirut
and Syrian Djebel (from which they export dried fruit).

74 Cyprus is off to port and they near Tortosa
and Lizza and the Gulf of Liazzo, a pretty
place, but they turn to the east which brings them closer
to the mouth of the Orontes and the city
of Antioch, where Aquilant now throws a
generous purse to the captain and in a bit he
leads his horse down the gangplank and he rides
upstream to where it is said Martano abides.

75 It takes a while, but Aquilant finds out
that Martano went to Damascus with Orrigilla
for a tournament the king there was staging about
an escape he'd had, an adventure, a real thriller,
from which he emerged alive. There is no doubt
that Grifon would have followed them there, his will a
model for all the world of resolution
(about which there can be no redargution).

76 So on from Antioch, but this time he
is rather more cautious. This time he will go
on land, which may be slower than by sea,
but it's far surer as all travelers know.

To Lydia then and Larissa he goes and we
can follow his route as far as Aleppo where—lo
and behold!—a league from Mamuga he meets on the way
none other than Martano. What can one say?

- 77 Dumb luck? Perhaps, but I think there may be a plan
by which God rewards the virtuous and just
while punishing those who deserve it, as he can
surely do. We have to take this on trust.
So there is Martano, that insolent wicked man
with the prize of the joust on display, and clearly he must
have looked impressive. Aquilant thought at first
that this was his brother—but then that bubble burst.
- 78 The gleaming armor, after all, was his,
and the snow-white clothes he wore. And the horse, too,
he recognized. But even with all this,
there was something that was not quite right, askew
and unfamiliar (literally). The bliss
of finding his brother changed at once into
dismay and anger. Was his dear brother lost or
hurt? And who in hell was this impostor?
- 79 Grifon can take care of himself but could
be tricked somehow. Aquilant shouts out
a challenge: “Churl, villain, thief, no-good
bastard, where did you get that armor? Lout!
Where is my brother, you sack of turpitude?
Alive or dead? And explain to me about
that armor of his you are wearing! And his horse!
Nothing would please me more than to have to use force!”
- 80 At this angry voice, Orrigilla tried
to get away, but Aquilant caught the reins
of her palfrey. In the meantime, the knight beside
her trembled like a leaf and racked his brains

about what possible answer he could provide,
what lie he could invent that yet remains
plausible enough to satisfy
the brother's questions: how, and what, and why?

81 Aquilant's shouts subside, and in a lower
but just as determined a voice, he puts his sword
to Martano's throat and says, "I want to know or
you'll watch her lose her head and you have my word
that your own death will follow but it'll be slower
and messier. Now, tell me, you absurd
excuse for a human being, why do you wear
that armor and how is it that you dare?"

82 It worked before, and maybe now again
it will save his bacon. "This is my sister. She
and I are born of virtuous people, but when
Grifon led her into dishonesty
and shame, I could not bear it. Very few men
can best your brother by force, so it had to be
by trickery that I took her away—to allow
her to return to respectable life somehow.

83 "When Grifon lay asleep, I arranged it so
she could escape and we could travel as far
as possible from him. And leaving him no
clothing or armor was just to delay him. We are
harmless and he is unhurt I assure you, although
somewhat slowed in his pursuit." He swore
that all of this was true. Why would he lie?
He and the lady wanted not to die.

84 Some of this, as we know, was even true,
for liars like to leaven their tales with bits
and pieces of the truth, which helps them to
be believed. It's a shrewd thing and it's

just what Martano did, except that he threw
in that “sister” bit, and Aquilant’s wits
weren’t dull. (Indeed, it made him grumpy,
for he’d heard in Antioch of their rumpy-pumpy.)

85 “You lie!” Aquilant shouts and gives him a blow
that knocks out two of his teeth. There is much blood
and Martano is rendered helpless by its flow.
It isn’t at all the end, but it is a good
start, and Aquilant ties his arms up so
he cannot even struggle. And as you would
expect, he ties up Orrigilla as well,
ignoring all the lies she tries to tell.

86 Off they go in a very strange procession
through villages and towns along the way
to Damascus. Passive, without the least expression,
the captives follow in silence and obey.
Aquilant is fixed in his obsession
to find Grifon and thinks that his captives may
elicit some useful word from all the talk
of the townsfolk who come out to stare and gawk.

87 Their squires and baggage train come following after
and as they approach Damascus the population
greetes them with insults and derisive laughter,
for they recognize the knight who was such a sensation
turning tail at the joust and then by craft or
guile taking the credit and approbation
that belonged to another and better man than he.
He is a source of scorn and obloquy.

88 They gather around him. They know what fraud he is,
a sheep in wolf’s clothing, a liar, a cheat, a knave,
who betrayed his companion and tried to rob him of his
reputation as valorous and brave.

And the woman, too, who went along with this,
she was as bad, for when she was asked she gave
endorsement to all Martano's vainglorious lies.
It is good to see them back and cut down to size.

- 89 There is not only amusement but sentiment for
some retribution and punishment. Some shout
that they should be hanged from a lofty gibbet or
drawn and quartered. As the people mill about
the mood of the crowd grows darker and eager for
some grisly entertainment they are sure this lout
and his lady can provide as they suffer long
and loudly for what they did, which was very wrong.
- 90 The king hears of this news and right away
without his retainers or guards rushes out to greet
Aquilant, who has brought back the culprit, and say
that he is most welcome. The king is delighted to treat
him as an honored guest. Meanwhile, they convey
the captives to a dungeon—for a sweet
reversal of Grifon's recent experience there
the irony of which was lost on that pair.
- 91 The king takes Aquilant to where his brother
is still in bed, recuperating. Grifon
is much embarrassed at having caused such bother
and having been so wrong and wronged (but if on
matters of love, we were wiser and picked rather
likelier mates, then what would romancers riff on?).
As if it had been a joke, they laugh in fun.
But there are those captives still. And what should be done?
- 92 Aquilant and the king agree that the right
thing to do is the torture that the crowd
has asked for. Both the lady and the knight
can suffer entertainingly with loud

cries in which the public will delight.
Grifon on the other hand, too proud
to mention Orrigilla, takes the view
that the king should show mercy and even pardon the two.

- 93 The decision is taken however that for Martano flogging is probably right, but not so much that he expires during the whipping. Ah, no, let him get through it all. With a master touch, there's a jailor who can play him like a piano. But as to the woman's treatment, it is such a delicate problem that they decide to wait for Lucina's return, when she will decide her fate.
- 94 King Norandino is grateful that his error has been corrected. Sorrowful now and wise, he wants to be a better ruler and fairer, but also to make it up to Grifon. He tries to keep him always in mind—and not as a care or duty but a privilege. Realize that you have been wrong, that's easy. But to change and make yourself better—that is rare and strange.
- 95 And to celebrate, for Grifon but also his own transformation, the king decides the best thing to do is declare from the royal throne another tourney, and this one will attest to Grifon's worth and make his valor known throughout the world from the east to the far west. The tournament will be held a month from now. (The king, we suspect, enjoys these anyhow.)
- 96 He made all preparations for a splendid show and Rumor, with her powerful wings, delivered the announcement as she wended her way to Syria and beyond of the king's

intention and on to Phoenicia, and she ended up in Palestine. These are just the things that Astolfo likes. He tells the viceroy it could be something that they would both enjoy.

- 97 Of Sansonetto Turpin's history tells, whom Orlando himself baptized. And Charlemagne made him Jerusalem's governor. Astolfo dwells there, for the moment, and how can these two abstain from the great joust in Damascus? Fame compels both to go there hoping they may gain credit for their valor, their great skill with their lances, but most of all their spirit and will.
- 98 They're moseying along, easy and slow to keep themselves fresh for the contests that they face. The weather is not bad, and they chat as they go, enjoying themselves, but then at a certain place where two roads converge, they meet a man . . . Or, no, it's a woman dressed in armor, another case of feminine achievement in an arena dominated by men—but then think of Athena.
- 99 This is the maid Marfisa, a woman of great valor who has often brought to the brow of Orlando of Brava furrows and even sweat and to Rinaldo as well. We should mention how she never takes off her armor, early or late, day or night, having taken an oath. But now is not the time for that. She wanders here and there, looking for knights—and for trouble, I fear.
- 100 She sees two knights coming toward her. She is alone, but that only makes it better. Both look to be impressive warriors, strong in flesh and bone. She intends to test herself against them, but . . . See,

she knows Astolfo, the Paladin. They were thrown together in Cathay long ago when he was gracious to her and courteous. There's no need to try to conquer him and make him bleed.

101 Instead, she takes off her gauntlet and she raises her visor, which are gestures of friendliness. She calls out to him that this is a pleasant surprise or some such thing and is happy to express her amity. Then, ignoring her disguise or whatever one calls her masculine armor and dress, she embraces him, and he returns her greeting delighted that they once again are meeting.

102 They catch each other up with the news of where they've been and what they've done, and the Duke reports that they are on their way to Damascus—there the king is staging a tournament for the court's enjoyment. Marfisa takes it as a dare and says she will go along, for at these sports she is more proficient than most men and eager to demonstrate this once again.

103 Astolfo and Sansonetto both agree that she would be wonderful company and they make their way to Damascus while all three tell stories and chat to while away the day. Just outside the city there seems to be a pleasant inn where they are able to stay and rest to be fresh for the strenuous exercises in which they will all take part when Aurora arises.

104 The dawn as it turns out is bright and clear and they take up their weapons, buckle armor on, send to the king to say that they are here, and to ask what ground they are to meet upon

for the day's entertainment at which they plan to appear.
It's the public square to which the crowds are drawn,
all of Damascus, both high life and low.
To such an event as this, who would not go?

- 105 At one end of the square on display there are
the prizes Norandino has offered: a mace
and a sword both set with jewels and by far
too beautiful for use if one should face
an actual foe on a messy field of war.
Next to them, or anyway next to their case,
is a charger of such beauty that to ride
him would occasion envy on every side.
- 106 An offering of dappical lavishness,
Norandino made it, assuming it would
be won by Grifon who deserved no less.
The king could not imagine another so good.
It would be a compensation for his less
than perfect behavior before, for Grifon could
win the weapons, the charger and, to boot,
the suit of armor that merchant had found en route.
- 107 This had been the prize before and ought
to have gone to Grifon then, but Martano had
been bold enough to claim it (before he was caught).
Norandino of course was extremely glad
also to right this wrong, and if Grifon fought
as well as before, then surely he would be clad
in this, which would be a further recompense
for the wrongs he had suffered. It made perfect sense.
- 108 But Marfisa knew that armor—hers! She'd keep
his purpose from being fulfilled, for it had been
her possession once, and she had a deep
appreciation of its value in

protecting the wearer. She'd left it in a heap
in order to run faster so as to win
her sword back from wicked Brunello who
deserved the noose as people like him do.

- 109 I don't believe that I have to rehearse here
the story of what happened, for you have read
Orlando Innamorato, which makes it clear
what took place and no more need be said.
The important thing is that there it is, her gear,
almost as if it were Fate itself that had led
her to this place. One way or another she
will have it back: it is her destiny.
- 110 One way of course is to fight for it but then
there's a certain risk. She knows she is very good
but so are a lot of the others, experienced men.
And luck is a factor, as is well understood
by aficionados. She might well lose it again,
which she doesn't think she can bear. What person could?
She puts out her hand . . . to touch it? No, to seize
it back for herself. And without any obstacles, please.
- 111 She managed to grab some pieces but some she let
fall to the ground where they made a dismaying noise.
The king was stunned and as angry as he could get,
for this disturbed his regal equipoise.
He pointed at her and scowled, and this was met
with a prompt response that comes to one who annoys
his majesty. There are swords, lances, and maces,
and scowls of fury on all the people's faces.
- 112 For the king they do this of course, but for Grifon, too,
whose armor they think this rightly is. And she?
Imagine a young lady who's dressed up and who
is eager for music and dancing and such gaiety

to start . . . Such is her delight at this to-do.
It is like a party or perhaps a jamboree,
for she loves horses and weapons and grunting knights
whom she can wound and kill. She adores fights.

113 She spurs her horse and with her spear impales
one through the neck and another in the breast,
while the great weight of her charging steed assails
several more and knocks them down with the rest.
With a swing of her sword she cuts off a head. (These details
are gory but some people like them best.)
Another head she smashes and then she performs
transradial amputations on several arms.

114 Astolfo and Sansonetto have put on their chain
and plate, and they see Marfisa in a crowd
of people some of whom one would not entertain
at dinner. They come to her aid with loud
war cries, cutting a path in as humane
a way as they can manage to reach the proud
woman who is doing quite well but still
is outnumbered (which in the long run may bode ill).

115 Now knights of other nations are joining in,
and the games have turned to earnest and deadly fights,
the cause of which no one can even begin
to explain, but often that does not trouble knights.
The king had been insulted? He could have been,
but few either knew or cared about the rights
and wrongs of the situation. That would sort
itself out later. Now it was blood sport.

116 Some of these knights are helping the crowd, but some
who aren't from there decide it might be shrewd
to excuse themselves and take their leave (not dumb
by any means!). Most of them watch—as you'd

expect—being curious as to how it will come out in the end. They have no part in the feud. Grifon and Aquilant, however do have an interest here, which both of them pursue.

- 117 They see that Norandino's eyes are red with rage and, being told the cause, they agree that this is wrong. Further, it may be said that Grifon is also upset, knowing that he is injured along with the king. These spirited knights take up their lances and with esprit spur their horses on to enter the fray to extract revenge and thus recoup the day.
- 118 On the other side is Astolfo on his fine horse Rabican and, with his enchanted lance, he strikes down all those whom he meets—of course the list begins with Grifon: by some chance, he knocks him to the ground, such is the force of the impact. And to Aquilant's shield a glance of a blow at the edge tips him so that he lies stretched out on the turf and blinking his eyes.
- 119 Before Sansonetto, knights of great repute get knocked from their saddles or else jump down and flee. The people, not surprisingly, follow suit and scurry from the square to try not to be wounded or killed. The king's rage is acute as Marfisa takes both breastplates and helmets and she also takes her leave. With great chagrin he watches as she trots off to the inn.
- 120 Astolfo and Sansonetto follow. They find that everyone gives way before them, and they stop at the portcullis. But Grifon behind and Aquilant are shamed and have nothing to say.

Both of them on the ground like that? What kind
of knight was he? It isn't every day
that the two of them encounter such a thing.
They are too embarrassed to face the angry king.

121 They mount their horses and chase their enemies while
the king follows along with retainers, ready
to have revenge or death, and in the style
the rabble uses, the crowd sets up a steady
chant: "Fongool! Fongool!"—from about a mile
away. Grifon of course is riding ahead. He
sees the three companions he is pursuing
waiting on the bridge. What are they doing?

122 But it's Astolfo! Grifon recognizes
the horse, the armor and the same devices
he wore when he killed Orrilo. Such surprises
happen sometimes, though seldom are they as nice as
this—for the heat of battle often disguises
even our friends from us, while calm suffices
to bring us to our senses. "But who are these
people with you? Introduce us, please.

123 "And, if you would, explain what happened there
with the armor. Whatever on earth did any of you
think you were doing?" To Grifon's inquiring stare
Astolfo of course replies and gives a true
account—that he and Sansonetto share
a concern for the brave Marfisa whom the two
happened to meet on the road not long ago
and of course they wanted to help her, don't you know?

124 Now Aquilant rides up and he sees that his
brother is chatting with the paladin.
The anger that was in his heart now is
suspended, at least for a moment. He listens in.

And Norandino's men, observing this,
also stop. Is there a way to win
without even having to make some kind of attack?
Can they get the armor and their honor back?

- 125 One of the smarter soldiers notices that
Marfisa is among those on the bridge. He tells
King Norandino who she is and what
she is able to do, as if she is one of hell's
own furies. It may be wiser to cut
and run than risk having to make farewells
to light and life. Or, bluntly and in short,
that woman could destroy the entire court.
- 126 Norandino is impressed but also prudent
and, at the mention of that much-feared name,
decides to pull his soldiers back. (Who wouldn't?)
The vassals have no objection to make for the same
thought has occurred to most of them—that it couldn't
hurt to talk for a while and see what came
of that. Their difference is not, after all, doctrinal.
And death is unappealing and terribly final.
- 127 Meanwhile, the sons of Oliver (Grifon and
Aquilant) and Otho's son (I mean
Astolfo) have been trying to understand
Marfisa's position and what she might have been
intending—which is simply that the grand
armor is hers, and it seems to her obscene
that the king should give away what is not his
as the prize of the jousts. What kind of thing is this?
- 128 The king is there now and she speaks to him in direct
discourse of how she left it all in the road
when she was chasing a thief. And he can inspect
it now to see her device in it that showed

to whom it belonged. This is, indeed, correct, for there are the markings engraved, a kind of code on the triple crown and the corselet, just where she's said they'd be. The king at once agrees.

- 129 The king confirms, "It was a short while ago that the merchant gave it to me. He said that it was just lying there in the road. And even though I've given it to Grifon, seeing as it's rightfully yours—as he and I both know—he would have given it back to me. He has a very nice sense of honor, and he would admit at once that your title to it is good.
- 130 "I do not have to look at the marks for I give credence to what you say as much as to any man or woman alive. You have it by right but also by prowess: there aren't many who could in a joust excel so as to deny your indisputable claim to it." And when he finished with her, he turned to Grifon and said that he should have a greater prize instead.
- 131 Grifon did not care about the suit of armor and was eager that the king should be satisfied. He did not want to dispute the issue, but with a grace that he could bring to settle such matters declared his absolute delight: "For me to be contributing and doing your will is prize enough for me." Marfisa replied with equal courtesy.
- 132 She thanked both men for their gallantry and received the armor as a gift, after which, in peace, they all returned to the city together, relieved and happy. The jousts resumed with an increase

in zest and joy, and Sansonetto received
the prize, for now Astolfo and all of these
friends declined to participate or fight
with one another, which would not have been right.

133 They spend a week with Norandino or
a little more, and then they bid goodbye,
troubled as they are about the war
in France, which needs the help they can't deny
any longer. Marfisa comes, too, for
a chance to meet the paladins and try
her skill with theirs. She desires to get her
chance at last to show the world who's better.

134 Are all these famous warriors as good
as they are so often said to be? She is
unconvinced and doubts that anyone would
give her much trouble. Delegating his
duties in Jerusalem so that he could
join up with the other four in this
expedition, Sansonetto is free
to go with them to Tripoli and to sea.

135 In Tripoli a carrack is about
to sail for Europe, and they make a deal
for themselves and also their horses to ship out
as soon as they can. The captain is a real
old salt from La Spezia, somewhat stout.
The weather is looking good, and they all feel
optimistic that their journey will go
smoothly with steady gentle winds that blow.

136 They sail as far as Cyprus, the island that
is sacred to Venus. There a miasmatic swamp
is not only harmful to human beings but
even rusts metal with its insidious damp.

Why would cruel Nature have thought to put
this marsh they call Constanza close to the pomp
of Famagusta? To the rest of the island she
is munificent in her generosity.

137 The stench from the swamp is such that they have to leave
as soon as they can. They head northeast and spread
every inch of canvas they can and heave
on the lines to make all possible speed as they head
for Paphos, a lovely island where they receive
a friendly welcome. (To this beach it is said
that Venus once emerged from the ocean's foam
and the locals claim this as her rightful home.)

138 As you approach, you can see the island rise
out of the water with myrtles and lemon trees,
and the smell of brine gives way to the tang of spice—
marjoram, wild thyme, and such as these.
Roses are everywhere before your eyes,
and lilies and crocus enrich every passing breeze.
As if to reward your ocean passage, this
paradise presents its array of bliss.

139 There is a spring that brings fresh water to
the countryside and nourishes the plants
that blossom everywhere, and Venus who
loves this place gives a special radiance
to all the girls and women, ingénue
to aging matron, and interests them in romance,
even making them burn with strong desire
almost until the moment when they expire.

140 They hear again the story of Lucina
and King Norandino, and it is explained to them how
she's on her voyage homeward sailing in a
seaworthy vessel. The master, finished now

with his business on the island—it has been a profitable stop—directs his prow westward with a following wind to speed them onward. It's exactly what they need.

141 It continues fine for a while, but wouldn't you know that the wind, which is gentle at first and rather pleasing picks up a bit and then really starts to blow and there isn't any sign that it may be easing. The waves are larger and larger and they go up and dismally down while, wailing and wheezing in the rigging, the storm continues to grow stronger, with peals of thunder lasting longer and longer.

142 Will the sky break into pieces? Will the lightning strikes set it afire? Sea below and sky join with one another in their dislikes of the travelers on the ship—who expect to die at any moment. Their fears have troughs and spikes, and a blackness stains the black of night as if dye instead of rain were battering down from above so that each of them pray for mercy and God's love.

143 The sailors, however, are going about their duties with skill and energy. One of them runs about blowing a loud whistle so he can toot his orders to the crew. (He cannot shout loudly enough to be heard above the bruit.) He's got one trying to reef the sails without falling overboard. The rudder and mast must also be secured if they are to last.

144 It's night now and the darkness darkens. The ship is headed out to the open sea where the waves may be less violent. The helmsman's iron grip aims the prow into the wind and saves

the vessel from turning turtle. The winds whip
and the furious rain lashes as he braves
the storm from moment to moment hoping that dawn
may bring relief. That's what they're banking on.

145 But what are hopes in the vastness of the sea?
Daybreak brings an even greater force
to the storm's mischief. They only know it to be
daytime from the counting of hours, of course,
for no sun lights the sky. Their misery
tips the balance from hope to fear of worse
weather and their very survival. They turn
the ship so the waves are hitting it from the stern.

146 While Fortune troubles them at sea let us now
turn to those on land where England and France
fight with the Saracen horde and consider how
Rinaldo cuts an opening and can advance
through the opposition's squadrons—like a plow
cutting a furrow. His predominance
is a matter of strength and will and courage, too.
It's just what we should expect Rinaldo to do.

147 Rinaldo headed Bayard, his noble steed,
toward Dardinello and saw his proud device.
He thought him a pretentious fellow indeed
to display in his quarterings what was a precise
copy of Orlando's. (But also, he'd
sent many soldiers on to paradise.)
"This upstart shoot must be cut back," he cried,
"before it is any further magnified."

148 Whichever direction Rinaldo takes all men
give way, both Christian and infidel, for so
respected is his mighty sword that when
they see him coming prudent soldiers go.

His progress is quite unimpeded then,
and soon he finds Dardinello and cries, “Ho!
Whoever gave you that shield gave you with it
trouble and danger—and not a little bit.

149 “We’ll see how well you guard those red and white
quarterings you’ve got there. But deal with me,
and you’ll still have Orlando to face and fight.”

Dardinello answered defiantly:

“If I bear this device, as is my right,

I know how to defend it, as you’ll see.

These are the Almont arms, and they shall gain
even more honor from you and from your pain.

150 “Do not think that because I am a boy
you can frighten me or cause me to yield
this shield I carry. Rather, I shall enjoy
taking yours. But either way, this field
shall show my mettle—which has no base alloy
but is I think well tempered and well steeled.”
Saying this, the lad took his sword and ran
to attack the famous knight of Montalban.

151 A sweaty fear gripped each Saracen heart
as they saw Rinaldo move like a lion at
a young bullock standing somewhat apart
from the herd. He was full of righteous rage, but that
did not prevent Dardinello, on his part,
from getting in the first blow on the hat—
or, helmet, I should say—Rinaldo had
won from Mambrino (who was extremely bad).

152 “Now let’s see,” Rinaldo taunted, “who
is better at finding the vein.” He spurred his horse,
loosened the reins, and charged, as he could do
with accuracy as well as deadly force.

The point went in at the chest and came out through
the upper back. This killed the youth of course.
Rinaldo pulled the spear from the gory hole
and blood gushed out with Dardinello's soul.

153 Have you ever seen a purple flower the plow
has cut and left to wilt and die, or else
a poppy bending its beautiful head low
because it has too much dew? So color spills
from Dardinello's handsome face and so
the life drains out. The soul no longer dwells
in that handsome body. And seeing him lie there
the courage of his troops melts to despair.

154 Consider a dam, a feat of engineering
that holds the waters back to make a lake,
and now imagine it breaking and the careering
waters that spill and spread out as they take
their natural courses downward. Thus appearing,
the Africans scatter in all directions and break
ranks, each unit, each man trying to save
himself, now unrestrained and no longer brave.

155 Those who flee Rinaldo lets go, but those
who think to stand firm he honors by attacking.
And wherever the valiant Ariodante goes
he leaves corpses behind, nor is there lacking
such trophies for Lionetto or, I suppose,
Zerbino either. As if they were all stacking
cord wood, they compete with each other for
glory in their performances in the war.

156 The Moors on that day are in greatest peril, and
none would have returned to his pagan nation
had their king himself not taken the matter in hand
and ordered a retreat. The situation

was desperate enough so that if they took a stand
they would have been facing mass decapitation.
Better, as they say, to run away
and then come back to fight another day.

157 He orders Stordilano, king of Granada
and the King of Andalusia to retreat
to the tents with the Portuguese where they still had a
ditch and earthworks to stave off a defeat.
He sends word to the King of Barbary: “Nada!
Save whatever you can! Revenge is sweet,
but we have to stay alive to bring that about.
Meanwhile let’s admit that this is a rout!”

158 Fortune had never shown him such a face,
hostile and disagreeable, and he
would have gone quite mad from the disgrace,
but he hoped to see Bizerta again and to be
home and alive. Meanwhile, from another place
on the field there was news that Marsilio had got free
and brought his troops to safety, one and all,
and had formed them up and summoned the recall.

159 Most of them, though, did not respond to the drum
or trumpet or signal of any other kind
but scattered in abject terror and ran from
the Christian forces, who, later, were to find
many of them drowned in the Seine. The glum
King Agramant tried to impose upon their blind
panic some order. He and his good ally
Sobrino attempted to get a few to rally.

160 But the best they can do in the end is to save one
out of three, perhaps. The other two have fled
to wherever in desperation they could run
or are lying there on the field, dying or dead.

Of those who are saved, the rare phenomenon
is one who is not wounded—in the head
or chest, or back. And all are lying about
panting, groaning, and utterly tired out.

161 The Christians are pursuing them even to
the gates of their encampment. Charlemagne knows
that when Lady Fortune deigns to smile at you,
you grab her forelock and you hold on—those
gestures are impolite but what you must do
to keep her attention fixed and, before it goes,
accomplish your purpose. The day went very well
but, as happens on the best of days, night fell.

162 Maybe it was the Creator who had some pity
for his creations, for blood flowed on the field
in rivulets into pools and not very pretty
lakes in which the contents were half congealed.
There were eighty thousand corpses—a sizeable city
of dead men. In the skies the vultures wheeled;
the peasants came out to rob the bodies; and when
they left, wolves came to feed upon the men.

163 Charlemagne doesn't return to the city but stays
to besiege the Saracen camp. He kindles a fire
around the perimeter and in such clever ways
harasses them. The pagans, who cannot retire,
improve their earthworks and redoubts. The day's
struggle continues all through the night in their dire
predicament. The guards, at the king's request,
do not even take their armor off to rest.

164 It isn't quiet. There is a chorale of groans,
lamentations, expressions of grief and pain,
some from the wounded themselves, whose piteous moans
are a basso continuo or, say, a refrain.

Others mourn their friends and comrades whose bones
are out on the battlefield where they will remain
without any proper farewell. And it must be said
that some, who are healthy, moan in simple dread.

- 165 This general suffering, though, is hard to get
our heads around. Let us concentrate
on a pair of Moors whose story I can set
before you. It is worthy to relate
as a splendid example of love and honor. Let
me give you Cloridano and his great
friend Medoro, from Tolomitta. They
had come with Dardinello, I ought to say.
- 166 In good times and bad, both showed him loyalty
and love. Cloridano was a hunter and had
a ruggedness that you'd expect to see.
Medoro was a rather more delicate lad,
fair haired, red cheeked, and full of jollity
that no one could resist, however sad.
He seemed an angel of the heavenly choir.
(I can think of no praise any higher.)
- 167 These two were on the embankment standing guard.
It was the midnight hour with darkness before
and behind in equal measure. It was hard
to stay awake, so they were chatting—of poor
Dardinello, their brave but evil-starred
friend and commander. Medoro was heartsore
that his body should be lying somewhere out there
with no one to pay it homage or to care.
- 168 “Cloridano,” he says, “I am much grieved
for my good lord, now food for the carrion birds.
I think of all the kindnesses we have received
at his hands . . . It is much too sad for words.

Although he is gone, his spirit might be relieved
if I were to find his body and give it a lord's
farewell, with all the ceremonies he's
entitled to and the proper obsequies.

169 “God may grant me that I shall manage this
unseen by the army of Charlemagne and return
safely—but should this plan not meet with his
approval, and I am killed, that men may learn
what I attempted what you must then do is
tell of my effort, so that my ghost may earn
honor, respect, credit, and even fame
that I hope will attach forever to my name.”

170 Hearing these words Cloridano is so
awed that he tries his utmost to persuade him
not to do this reckless thing. To go
to seek Dardinello's body? The chances are slim
that he will succeed or return alive. But, no,
Medoro is determined, and the grim
expression on his face suggests that he
will not be dissuaded by his companion's plea.

171 Cloridano then says that he too
will go along, to equal his friend in daring.
“What use could I possibly be,” he asks, “without you?
Better to die of the sword than later of caring
for a friend whom I perhaps could have helped to do
that noble thing that both of us should be sharing.”
Medoro of course cannot refuse his friend.
To do so would be to insult and condescend.

172 They find replacement guards for themselves and take
off from the ditches. Soon they are out on the field.
The Christians are unafraid and few are awake.
Their fires are mostly out. They do not wield

their weapons or have them close at hand—a mistake
Cloridano sees, and in what is revealed
he sees an opportunity—to kill
some of these men who did their king such ill.

173 Cloridano thinks about it: “A good
idea strikes me, for it would be a shame
to let such a chance go by. I think I could
do some damage. To further this good aim,
I’d ask you to keep your eyes peeled, if you would,
so that no one interrupts us while I maim
and kill as many enemies as I
can and leave them bleeding where they lie.”

174 Just then he comes to the place where Alfeo, the wise
physician and mage was sleeping, Charlemagne’s
astrologer and advisor. Cloridano defies
Alfeo’s prophecies, bashing out his brains.
And then he kills four more whose abrupt demise
Turpin mentions although somehow he refrains
from giving their names. And the passage of much time
has dimmed their fame from memory and my rhyme.

175 The next of the Christian forces he dispatches
is Palidon of Moncalieri (it’s
somewhere in the Piedmont, I think). He catches
him asleep between two horses, hits
him in the throat so hard he almost detaches
the head from the place on top of the neck where it fits.
What’s admirable is the silence of this, which of course is
necessary—to keep from scaring the horses.

176 Then he comes to Grillo (the name in Greek
means *hog*, I believe). He’s lying on a wine
keg he’s drained. He’s drunk and there is a reek
of alcohol on his breath. He’s feeling fine,

dreaming he's still drinking, which in this bleak
and sorry world is a splendid anodyne.
The Saracen chops his head off and gushing forth
is a mixture of blood and wine in a crimson froth.

177 And then there are two more sports, Andropono who is
Greek, and Conrad, a German. They have had fun
drinking and dicing for most of the night but this
is tiring after a while and when they were done
they lay down to nap. (In a parenthesis
we may observe how persistence in vice is one
way of avoiding disaster.) He kills these folks
with a couple of very efficient and deadly strokes.

178 Think of a hungry lion whom long fasting
has made even more voracious than before,
breaking into a stable where, for repasting,
are beeves upon beeves, with flesh and blood and gore
that yield to his power. Such was the flabbergasting
spree of Cloridano (except for the roar).
Medoro, too, joins in but scruples prevent
his killing plebeians and peasants of mean descent.

179 He finds the Duke of Labretto in the embrace
of a mistress of his. They cling one to another
in warmth and love. If you're going to die, their case
is as good as any. I can't think of one I'd rather
have. He beheads them both, and they go their ways
still conjoined to wherever it is that Father
Abraham may put them that would accord
with what they've deserved—punishment or reward.

180 Malindo he kills and his brother Ardalico,
sons of the Count of Flanders whom Charlemagne
had installed as knights only hours ago
with fleurs-de-lys on their blazons and, I should explain,

a promise of lands in Frisia. But, no,
Medoro interferes. Their hopes are in vain.
The only lands they get are small pieces of ground
in which their moldering bones may yet be found.

181 By now they are approaching the circle of tents
around headquarters where Charlemagne rests. His men
are alert for here security is intense,
and the two agree that this is the moment when
they should stop pushing their luck. It also makes sense
not to try for booty. The Saracen
honor that they shall have in this pursuit
will be worth far more than any possible loot.

182 Cloridano goes to another part
of the battleground where, among the swords and shields,
is a scene that only the very hardest heart
could contemplate without tears. The torn-up field's
turf is red with blood. Not far apart
from rich are poor. A close inspection yields
kings and vassals, horses upside down,
and parts of bodies scattered all around.

183 It's a charnel house, a shambles, but it goes on
for miles, and the two of them realize that the odds
are very long against their coming upon
the one corpse they are seeking. But the gods
are looking down as Medoro prays to the wan
moon above, asking as he plods
along among these horrors that it may show
him and his companion where to go:

184 "O triple goddess, who in heaven, here,
and down in hell you have your different faces,
favor us beyond our deserving, appear,
and guide us through the horrors of these places.

Show us among these corpses where the dear
body of our late king lies. Your grace is
needful to us now, who bear you love,
and pray to you to shine down from above.”

- 185 At that very moment, whether in answer to
Medoro’s fervent prayer, or perhaps by mere
coincidence, the Moon somehow broke through
the cloud cover to shine down bright and clear,
as lovely as she had been the night she knew
Endymion for the first time . . . But I fear
I digress. It’s enough to say it was bright:
they could see Montléry and Montmartre to the right.
- 186 And the moonlight was especially clear in the place
where Dardinello lay. Medoro went
to the body of his lord, and on his face
were meandering rivers of tears, the effluent
of pious grief. There, within a pace
or two, was the shield, battered now and bent,
with the quarterings of red and white that we
know he carried. No question it was he.
- 187 The winds fall to a dead calm as though
out of respect for Medoro’s grief and pain.
In a low voice appropriate to their so
serious work he speaks, and they take the slain
king up and onto their shoulders and go
off with all the speed that they can maintain
with their dear but heavy burden on their shoulders,
picking their way through the corpses and many boulders.
- 188 By this time, the Lord of Daylight was sweeping away
the stars from the nighttime sky and darkness from
the earth. The gallant Zerbino, I may say,
has been busy all night. He does not succumb

to the blandishments of sleep when he can slay many Moors and more while there are some left for his sword. But now he is coming back to camp after his successes in attack.

189 There was with him a party of other knights,
and from a distance they saw the two friends who carried something heavy. Booty no doubt? These fights leave lots to be gathered. Cloridano was worried at their approach. “Surely it expedites our flight if we leave the corpse. We both are wearied, and it’s better to save two living men,” he said, “than for us to be killed so that all three of us are dead.”

190 So saying, he dropped his part of the body. He thought Medoro would do likewise. It would have been the sane thing to do. But poor Medoro was caught in the meshes of honor and love, and therefore in a moment of splendid folly this distraught young man kept on alone. To his chagrin Cloridano, who thought his friend was along right behind him, discovered that he was wrong.

191 The knights position themselves as they have done many times before, blocking all ways of escape. It’s tedious but also it is fun, and anyway this is what they do for their day’s pay. Zerbino, observing how they run, is sure they are heathens, and if that is the case, it is all the more important to capture or kill the two of them. That, after all, is the drill.

192 Fortunately, there’s a woodland into which the Saracens can run, and maybe hide behind some boulder or in a ravine or ditch, or on the labyrinthine mountainside.

Do you think they may survive? It is at this pitch
of suspense that I must stop. We are sleepy-eyed,
and it would be better to go on about
these things when the candles are not all guttering out.

Canto Decimonono

- 1 When he sits serene on top of Fortune's wheel,
a man cannot possibly know who his friends are
or distinguish the pretenders from the real.
It's only when the wheel turns, throwing him far
downward do changed circumstances reveal
those few whose voices in the tintamarre
were honestly meant and no mere puffs of breath.
This is true in life and after death.

- 2 If hearts were as easy to read as faces, we
would know of those in court who like to oppress
their underlings, and likewise we could see
the wisdom of those who wear humility's dress—
and the lord would exchange their lots so they could be
in their proper places. But pardon, I digress.
Let us return to Medoro, grateful, devoted,
and loyal even after death (as you have noted).

- 3 He's trying to save himself and staggering through
the brambled woods with Dardinello's weighty
body on his shoulders. If only he knew
which way to go! Leaving it up to fate, he
finds himself among thorn trees. (What to do?)
Cloridano is far off. We calculate he
must have gone, unencumbered, at a pace
that was faster and he's found a hiding place.

- 4 It's a secluded spot and quiet so
that he does not hear the shouting of those who've been
following after him. He realizes, though,
that he and Medoro got separated in
their flight. He feels just awful about it. "Oh,
what to do? My friend through thick and thin,
and I have been remiss, I am afraid.
Wherever you are is where I should have stayed."
- 5 Saying this, he rushes back on the same
path he has taken, directly into the menace.
He can hear horses and shouts that, to his shame,
he fled just moments before. What he sees then is
Medoro, all alone. It's a cruel game
Zerbino and his men are playing—tennis
but he's the ball, and he bounces from elm to oak,
still carrying the corpse. They think it's a joke!
- 6 There are nearly a hundred on horseback, some of whom laugh
as he circles like a top while they surround him
in tighter and tighter circles. He's driven half-
mad and is exhausted, for since they found him,
he has been running. Beleaguered by ruffraff
he puts the body gently down on the ground—him
whom he loved so well, and still tries to protect
from all these soldiers, as is quite correct.
- 7 Think of a she-bear standing in front of her lair
where a hunter threatens. Her heart is torn between
rage at the intruder who threatens there
and love for the cubs behind her. She bares her mean
claws and her sharp teeth and rends the air
with defiant growls, but as she is making this scene
she looks back in love to the helpless cubs inside
whose safety she is attempting to provide.

- 8 Cloridano thus is torn. He has lost
all hope but his resolve nonetheless remains
firm that his death should be at the greatest cost
he can extract from them. He takes some pains
aiming an arrow and letting it fly at the most
convenient target. It zings and pierces the brains
of a menacing Scot who leans from his saddle and falls
to the ground with a clatter that pleases or appalls,
- 9 depending of course on your point of view. They wheel
to face the direction from which the arrow flew,
and the Saracen sends another one to seal
the fate of another Scottish soldier who
is asking where the shooter was—but he'll
never get the question out, for through
the neck this arrow comes now, cutting off
his words and breath. He dies with a quiet cough.
- 10 At this Zerbino's patience is at an end.
"You'll pay for this," he cries, and he grabs the hair
of the Saracen whom he intends to send
abruptly from this world. But the face, so fair,
fills his heart with pity to amend
his cruel plan. The youth speaks with a prayer:
"In the name of God, I ask you spare me for
a little while. Ten minutes, perhaps. No more.
- 11 "Allow me to bury the body of my king.
I ask no quarter for myself. You may
do with my corpse what you like, but I should bring
the proper honors to my liege today.
For me? As Theban Creon, unpitying,
decreed for Polyneices. But let me lay
his bones to rest and I shall be content
and consider your indulgence as heaven sent."

- 12 Who could hear such words and not be moved?
The modesty, the chivalric selflessness,
and the spirit were what Zerbino had always loved.
A mountain of stone would have softened with less
impressive a speech. Of course the knight approved,
but on one of his retainers this address
had little effect. He saw it as a chance
to wound or kill Medoro and threw his lance.
- 13 Zerbino is all but beside himself in his
fury at this insubordinate knight.
And to make his anger even hotter there is
the youth before him, hit and ashen white,
quite motionless upon the ground. If this
isn't death, it's close enough, despite
Zerbino's feelings and intentions. He turns
to the knight who threw the lance, and his anger burns
- 14 bright in his eyes: "This misdeed will not go
unpunished." He advances upon the man
and is about to fight with him, but, no,
the miscreant turns tail and, rather than
face him, is running away. The men are slow
to react, and Cloridano thinks he can
take advantage of this moment to
aid his friend and see what he can do.
- 15 Never mind the bow, he takes his sword
and enters hacking and slashing. What he desires
is to die as much as to kill, and thus afford
himself the heavy penance he requires
for deserting his friend. He strikes but he is gored
and stricken himself and, wounded thus, he tires.
The ground is red with his blood, and in the end
he falls to the ground and lies beside his friend.

- 16 The Scotsmen take off to follow their leader who chases
after the disobedient knight. They leave
the two Moors stretched upon the ground where their case is
very grave. One's dead, I do believe,
and Medoro's life is dwindling down to traces
of a faint and irregular pulse. He must receive
treatment at once. If someone does not arrive
to give him the care he needs, he won't survive.
- 17 And there she is! Just in the very nick
of time a lovely maiden, but dressing down
in a shepherdess' frock. She sees that he's sick
and in need of attention. But who is this with a crown
of well-coiffed hair? (Do I lay it on too thick?)
It's Angelica, that woman of great renown.
She is, you recall, the daughter of the Grand
Kahn of Cathay, that most mysterious land.
- 18 Let us recap: When she again had the ring
(You do remember the ring!) Brunello had seized,
her ownership went to her head, I'm afraid. No thing
or person was good enough. In contempt she sneezed
at Orlando, who'd loved and once had been suffering,
and Sacripant, who for a time had pleased
this haughty girl. Now she can only groan
thinking of them. She prefers to be alone.
- 19 But of all of these, the love of which she most
repented was what she had felt for Rinaldo. She
had debased herself, she thought, and she could boast
that of such embarrassments she was now quite free.
But Love, so treated, often makes a riposte
and he stood in Angelica's path where there could be
no question of missing when he aimed his bow
and arrow at her and prepared to let it go.

- 20 She saw the wounded youth growing ever weaker.
When she heard the details of his story she
was smitten, she thought by pity, but the wrecker
of that pain was Love (as we know him to be).
Her haughty hardened heart was softer and meeker
as she saw the cost of his nobility
of spirit. And in addition to all of these
qualities, his looks did not fail to please.
- 21 The story would be darker had she not
in India studied surgery once where they
are experts at it, and she'd not forgot
any of those skills that on this day
were vital, for she knew exactly what
to do, what herbs to gather and the way
they ought to be applied to stop the flow
of blood. These are convenient things to know.
- 22 A short time before, she remembered, she'd seen a plant,
dittany, maybe, or possibly panacea,
but one that staunches the flow of blood. She'd want
a sprig of that. It's also said to be a
cure for convulsions and experts think there can't
be a better analgesic. The idea
of going to get some of that now crossed her mind. It
wasn't far off. She knew where to find it.
- 23 She goes to fetch it and on her way back she meets
a cowherd on horseback who is searching for
a heifer that's gone astray, but she entreats
him to come with her to aid the poor
Medoro, who is in danger and whose heart beats
but faintly as he ventures near death's door.
The kindly herdsman agrees to go along.
To refuse to help at such a time would be wrong.

- 24 They go back to the wounded knight and dismount. She takes
the herb and with a stone crushes its leaves.
Its juices and the pulverized bits she makes
into a powerful poultice that achieves
her purpose in relieving his various aches
and staunching his blood. The supine youth receives
the medicine in the wound and on his breast
and belly where its effectiveness is best.
- 25 He revives. His improvement is all but miraculous.
He thinks he is able to ride the cowherd's mare,
but he refuses to leave (no surprise to us)
until his king is properly buried there.
And his friend Cloridano, too. This onerous
task completed, he has no further care
and allows himself to be led away. They go
to the cowherd's house, taking it easy and slow.
- 26 It's better than most cottages. She decides
to stay there with him until he has regained
more of his strength as a caregiver should—and besides,
she's begun to recognize how her heart was pained
by the arrow that Love had fired. But love coincides
with duty sometimes. Whyever it was, she remained
sitting by his bedside to cool his brow
with a damp cloth—both doctor and lover now.
- 27 It's a nice little cottage, actually, between
two mountains in a little woodland. He
had built it himself. His wife kept it quite clean.
And the children? They were as quiet as could be.
The wound continued to heal, but in the mean-
while the wound in her heart got worse, as we
are not surprised to learn. That bandit with wings
has deadly aim and is good at these kinds of things.

- 28 And the irritants are there exacerbating
her discomfort. Those handsome eyes! That hair!
She feels herself severely deteriorating,
burning as if with fever. She does not care
for herself but only for him on whom she is waiting.
For hours she sits without stirring, near despair
as she gazes down upon that perfect face,
each touch with the cloth in her hand a furtive embrace.
- 29 His strength returns; hers ebbs. She is like snow
that melts in the springtime's warmth when the sun shines
down upon it. She feels that heat, although
it comes from within her. Each day she declines.
He's feeling fairly good now in steady but slow
progress. She, on the other hand, repines
and is in constant torment. What to do?
There is no potion for this or healing brew.
- 30 The girl understands what is happening perfectly well
and is beside herself. In desperation
she waives the protocol and decides to tell
the youth what ails her, making a declaration
that he may choose to spurn (which would be hell
on wheels) or he could show appreciation
for what she's done for him, or pity, or
even perhaps reciprocate and more.
- 31 Ah, Orlando! Oh, Sacripant, how do
your brave hearts and your courage help you here?
Honor? Of course! But what is that to you?
Angelica turned away from you both! That dear
treasure of hers that you both used to pursue
she gives to Medoro! All of your sincere
devotion was for nothing. She has learned
to love at last—but after you've been spurned.

- 32 And you, King Agrican, if it could be
that you were returned to the land of the living, this
would be an incredibly painful thing to see,
for she rejected all your offers of bliss.
And you, Ferrau, and a myriad others we
need not name here, desperate for one kiss
and willing to offer your lives, look here at how
comfortably she fits in his arms now.
- 33 Indeed Angela lets Medoro pluck
that rosebud no one has touched or seen before
from the ferny glade like the one in which bees suck
but no one had set foot in ever. A more
touching scene we cannot imagine. Good luck!
For they decide together their bachelor
days are over: matrimony seems
the right course for the fulfillment of their dreams.
- 34 The nuptials over, they spend their honeymoon
right there in the herdsman's cottage where they abide
for more than a month, and, morning, night, and noon,
they can't get enough of each other, now inside
and now outdoors by a brook they would commune.
It seems that neither can be satisfied,
nor their appetites for one another sated
in a passion that continues unabated.
- 35 In meadows and by the mossy banks of streams,
on hillsides, or in some hidden mountain grotto,
they frolic like a nymph and faun in dreams
of Arcadia of ancient poets. Or not to
expand too much, their amorous pleasure seems
like that of Dido and Aeneas (but to
a sadder end they came). We'll stipulate
that they enjoy each other and it is great.

- 36 Wherever there was a smooth-barked tree they'd mark
with a knife or even a pin their entwined names,
Angelica and *Medoro*, on the bark.
The two of them played such pleasant schoolyard games
scratching initials on soft rocks as a lark,
a kind of lithograph—and each proclaims
until it weathers away that this is a place
in which the couple enjoyed a sweet embrace.
- 37 When it seemed to her that their stay had been extended
long enough, she said she might like to go
home to Cathay. *Medoro* was clearly mended,
and there he could wear a crown that she would bestow
upon him and rule as king, which would be splendid.
I ought to mention her golden bracelet, though.
Count Orlando had given it to her to wear
and indeed it was gorgeous and had a certain flair.
- 38 It was a gift from *Morgana* to *Ziliante*
(*Brandimart's* brother), when she had kept him in
captivity in the lake. It's relevant! He
escaped and with *Orlando's* help could win
his freedom once again. *Poco curante*,
he gave *Orlando* this not very masculine
trinket, which the latter took and gave
to *Angelica* to whom his heart was a slave.
- 39 It wasn't for *Orlando's* sake but merely
because it was so elegant and fine
that *Angelica* loved the golden bracelet dearly.
(One wonders how on the Isle of Tears those swine,
who exposed her on that rock and were sincerely
terrible, didn't take it. Perhaps divine
interference?) Anyway, she still
had it, and she thought it would fit the bill

- 40 as a present for the cowherd and his good
wife, whose help and hospitality were
an example of how all men and women should
behave but mostly don't. It seemed to her
that they should have it. She asked if they would
remember by it the grateful traveler
who had been happy here. "We shall depart,"
she said, "but we will keep you in our heart."
- 41 So it's off through the mountains to Spain where, for their trip,
they will go to Barcelona, or it could be
Valencia, and wait for a goodly ship
that's heading east and ready to put to sea.
They were traveling south, then, at a moderate clip
with the blue sea on their left, glinting pleasantly,
when something happened . . . What do you suppose
it was? An adventure? Ah, yes, one of those.
- 42 There's a crazy man who lies stretched out upon
the sand. He is filthy! Covered in mud and slime
on his front and back and his face. This woebegone
creature snarls like a dog and attacks them. I'm
just reporting here. But we'll move on
and turn to another subject for a time,
resuming with Marfisa. Angelica?
We'll catch up with her later. Ne worry pas.
- 43 Marfisa, Astolfo, Aquilant, and, yes,
Grifon, you will remember are at sea,
in a storm, and their vessel is in great distress,
as if there were some animosity
from the elements determined to distress
these people in particular. For three
days and nights it has raged. It is not finished,
nor even, by any possible measure, diminished.

- 44 The storm is eating at the vessel piece
by piece, first splitting asunder the quarterdeck
and then the fo'c'sle. The ship is wallowing; she's
losing whatever they cut away. They check
their position on the charts, squinting at these
by the light of a single lantern. Will they wreck?
On what rock, reef, or hostile shore of the sea?
Where in the hell are they? They can't agree.
- 45 One man stands at the prow while a crewmate is at
the poop. They have hourglasses and they try
to estimate the ship's progress by what
the lines they've lowered say. Half an hour goes by
and they meet at the captain's cabin and factor that
into the problem of how to identify
where they could be. The members of the crew
wrangle about it and each has a separate view.
- 46 One is sure they have passed Limisso (I think
it's somewhere on Cyprus). Another is certain they are
off Tripoli, where on the rocks ships often sink.
A third suggests Satalia or not very far
from there. The question—where they'll go into the drink—
is mostly theory. The storm is spectacular
and with no control at all over where they're going
there's hardly any practical use in knowing.
- 47 On the third day, the storm grows even worse,
which wouldn't have seemed possible, but it breaks
and carries away the foremast. At the reverse
end of the ship, the rudder goes and it takes
the helmsman with it. It seems like some kind of curse,
so that even a brave—or foolhardy—spirit quakes.
Marfisa, no nervous Nellie as I hear,
could not on that occasion deny her fear.

- 48 Now we see faith wallowing also as each
promises to make a pilgrimage to Rome,
or Sinai, or Compostella, if they reach
land ever again. (There are probably some
other sites as well.) The waters breach
over the gunwales and then subside to come
back with greater force as if to try
to fling the entire vessel into the sky.
- 49 They also do practical things: they jettison stuff,
bales, chests, the entire cargo. They man
the pumps and bail with buckets. It isn't enough.
There's more water coming in than they possibly can
dispose of, and the ship is bouncing in rough
waves that make repairs tricky to plan
and harder to carry out. But the shipwrights do
as well as they can what the captain orders them to.
- 50 It's the fourth day now, and they're tired and in despair.
There's nothing more they can think of and the foul
weather holds. They have no notion where
they are anymore. They would throw in the towel
if only they had one, but then they see up there
on a storm sail near the bow in the winds' howl
the glow of St. Elmo's fire, a wonderment
that means that the stormy weather may relent.
- 51 Seeing this, the travelers knelt and prayed
as tears of gratitude streamed down their faces,
and they asked that the awesome force of the storm be stayed
by even greater forces—mercy's and grace's.
And, indeed, the Mistral wind began to fade,
and of Libeccio (the southwest wind) the embrace is
welcome, for he blows the ship along
at a rapid clip, unswerving and quite strong.

- 52 The captain is now concerned that at this speed they may hit something, or the vessel may disintegrate from the stresses. What they need is somehow to decelerate so they retain at least some control as they proceed. He throws out drags and orders the crew to pay out cable so that they can at least slow down, for if the ship breaks up they all will drown.
- 53 We can wonder whether the captain's prudent actions or divine intervention saved the vessel, but each played their part, I believe, in whatever fractions we choose to assign, and each of us may reach his own conclusions. But these are mere abstractions one plays with after the fact to study and teach. The important point, however it is explained, is that after the storm subsided, the ship remained.
- 54 They come into sight of land on the Syrian coast at the Gulf of Aiazza, near a city of some size with two castles at the outermost reaches of the harbor. Suddenly glum, the captain, who turned as pale as any ghost, was afraid to make port. But he could not flee from this dreadful place: his masts and the yards were gone, and the rudder too, so he could not sail on.
- 55 To moor there would be to have to choose between slavery and death, for this was a dread place, well known to seamen. Few had been able to escape, but those had said terrible things went on—truly obscene and cruel customs. He was discomfited: they could not run, or land, or just stay there waiting to be boarded. Pure despair!

- 56 Astolfo sees that he is troubled and he
asks what the problem is. Why have they not
entered port, which is, as all can see,
so close at hand? The captain tells him what
bothers him, and we can all agree
it is a dreadful fix into which they've got
themselves. Astonished, Astolfo listens to
the captain's description of what these people do.
- 57 This part of the Syrian coast, the captain explains,
is owned by weird and murderous females whose
ancient laws put males either in chains
or else to death. For that brave soul who may choose
to escape this dismal fate, their law ordains
that he must fight ten men and never lose,
and if he succeeds at this, must show his might
by bedding ten of their maidens that same night.
- 58 And suppose he gets through the fights in the daytime and then
fails at night? He's put to death on the spot,
and those who are with him are treated as serving men,
ditch diggers, swineherds, cowherds or what not.
But say he succeeds. Those who were with him when
he arrived are allowed to leave—but they have got
him forever, husband to ten girls whom
he is allowed to choose to become bridegroom.
- 59 You're laughing, right? But so was Astolfo who
could barely suppress his mirth as he heard of these
outlandish customs. Sansonetto, too,
grinned and first among his hypotheses
was that this was some old salt's tale—as you
might have supposed as well. But patience, please.
It turns out not to be an exaggeration
but fact and in all the books of navigation.

- 60 The sailors agree with the captain, but Marfisa and her companions take a different view. After the storm they've just been through, to seize a chance to go ashore is something you do not lightly dismiss. An enemy's a lot less to be feared than the deep blue sea that's now behind them. Swords or spears out there don't work. One only has one's fears.
- 61 Strongest in his preference, and with good cause, was Astolfo, who knew that with his powerful horn he didn't have to worry much. The laws of magic are on his side and he can scorn all danger, for a blast will soon transpose the countryside in earshot to a forlorn and empty place. Of course, he does not say any of this. Persuasion's the better way.
- 62 The master agrees that they will go into port, and soon they see a sizeable galley that approaches, fully armed and manned. In short, it confirms all his worst fears that they are at a horrid place. They heave a line athwart the ships and, though it's not a lariat, the crew makes it fast to a cleat by the high prow. They are in tow. It's all decided now.
- 63 The ship cannot maneuver at all and they get rowed to shore. But as this is going on the knights buckle on their armor and they say encouraging things to the captain, woebegone and skeptical, and the sailors, too, to allay their apprehensions, for many of them bemoan their plight and prospects, which very clearly are not only frightening but also bizarre.

- 64 The harbor is shaped like a crescent moon of four miles' circumference. The mouth is narrow though, six hundred paces across. As I said before, there are castles on each side. It's tough to go against the position in any kind of war. The city spreads out behind it, row on row of buildings like seats in a theater, wider as you climb up the hill from which there's a splendid view.
- 65 They anchor the ship and six thousand women swarm down to the harbor, all of them armed with bows and spears. (For certain tastes this has some charm.) Behind them there are chains so that no ship goes through without permission. Had not the storm disabled them, they'd still be caught there. Those women have worked this all out in advance and seem to have left little or nothing to chance.
- 66 Their leader steps forward to explain their choices. Old? She makes Hecuba look like the bloom of youth. The Sibyl of Cumae we have always been told is the champion of senescence, but in truth this woman would take the silver if not the gold medal for the extreme length of her tooth. She offers them captivity or death and pops a mint in her mouth to freshen her breath.
- 67 She explains the peculiar loophole—how one man, if he can kill ten opponents during the day and then on that same night if the fellow can satisfy ten maidens whom he'll lay, having displayed such all but Olympian strength, he can be prince here. The rest can stay or leave, as they choose, and travel anywhere they like which she suggests is only fair.

- 68 “On the other hand,” she says, “if he fails to do successfully all that’s on the program, he is put to death at once, and all of you remain here and your fate is slavery.” She grins in delight that no one would construe as affable. Her curious gaiety seems not to be shared by any of the ship’s company, who are silent and bite their lips.
- 69 The crone is expecting terror, but what she sees is courage and defiance among the knights for each of the men is confident that he’s up to the tests she has set for them and by rights ought to be the one to compete. (Though she’s perhaps at a disadvantage when the lights are lowered for the events of the evening hours, Marfisa, too, is eager to show her powers.)
- 70 They let the captain know that they have one who will represent them in the lists and be their champion. There is nothing else to be done, so he throws the hawsers out, makes fast, and he puts out the heavy gangway that holds a ton or more, so that the enormous horses we know they have can be led safely ashore, where one of the knights will face a difficult chore.
- 71 As they pass through the city they see the women, proud and young, and wearing short dresses so they can fight as warriors do. Men aren’t allowed ever to wear spurs on their feet and may not carry swords—unless they’re in a crowd of ten, as there will be, of course, today. Mostly the males sew and weave and spin, and do those things we think of as feminine.

- 72 Some, used for plowing the fields, wear bonds.
Others, let loose, can watch the cows and sheep
out on the hillsides and meadows among the ponds.
But it must be observed that they only keep
a few around—the number corresponds
to the roosters a chicken farmer needs, a steep
disproportion. The general intent
is to keep their number close to ten percent.
- 73 The discussion among the knights seems to have stalled.
Which of them should attempt to perform the feats
of this biathlon? They're not quite appalled
but puzzled, say, when Marfisa says that the meets
are well within her competence. Is this a bald
lie? What has she planned for between the sheets?
If there is one who has guessed or who may think he
has the answer, hush! It's rather kinky.
- 74 But she insists that she will draw lots too
and she gets the short straw, as you might expect.
She speaks to them reassuringly, saying, "You
will not give up your freedom, for I will protect
you all, even staking my life to do
what is required." Then for dramatic effect,
she takes her sword and says that she can do what
Alexander did when he cut the Gordian knot.
- 75 "I do not intend to allow this troublesome land
to remain to harass travelers," she said.
"I shall survive, but the city shall not stand.
This is my promise." She showed no sign of dread,
and the others yielded at last to her demand
that she represent them on battlefield and in bed.
She was always wearing armor and was prepared
to appear on the field as very few men have dared.

76 At the highest part of the city there is a space more or less circular with spectator seats surrounding it. It is here that jousts take place, animal fights, and sometimes wrestling meets. There are four impressive bronze gates and these face in the four directions. An enormous crowd there greets Marfisa as she makes her entrance. She is on a dappled horse impressive to see.

77 He is a gift from Norandino, the best of the thousand in his stable, large and strong and willing in spirit. With him the king pressed upon Marfisa saddles and bridles along with the rest of the gear. He is the handsomest horse you've seen or heard about in song or story. Mounted on him, she enters in and the trumpeters make a celebratory din.

78 But is it in welcome for her or rather to bring the ten opponents out from the other side? From the northern gate, they file into the ring and are, indeed, impressive as they ride onto the field, but the one most challenging is the knight who leads them in. He is astride a steed as black as jet with one white spot on his left hind foot and (I almost forgot)

79 a white blaze on his forehead. The knight was dressed also in black and white and in much the same proportions, which perhaps was meant to suggest a mixture of sorrow and joy and to proclaim that this was their balance in him, too. A beau geste? But interesting, surely. As he came Marfisa paid much more attention to him than the other nine men in the crew.

- 80 The trumpets sounded again, and nine men set
their lances and prepared to charge. The man
in black didn't move. He was not prepared to forget
the laws of chivalry. When the joust began
he moved off to one side where he could get
a splendid view of the contest as they ran
toward each another, nine men to the north
against the one from the south, sallying forth.
- 81 Her horse has an assured and easy gait
as he gains speed and power. She sets her lance,
a huge piece of oak of such enormous weight
that four men would have hardly had a chance
to manage such a thing. At any rate,
she looks quite splendid as she makes her advance
so that a thousand spectators' faces pale
and likewise a thousand hearts begin to quail.
- 82 And they are right. The first man she struck in the chest
and the lance went through his shield, his corselet,
and then his body, coming out, one guessed,
a yard or so beyond his back. She met
the next with a loose rein and the easiest
bump that unseated him and, I regret
to report, he broke his back as he hit the ground.
And the third man? In the same way he is downed.
- 83 It's at this point that the six who are left figure out
that this seriatim business is not so good.
Better to come at her all at once in the bout
so that at least one of their number should
be able to get in a blow, and with a shout
they come at her together. The likelihood
is that while she is busy with three or four,
one of the others will somehow be able to score.

- 84 And several of their lances do indeed
hit her, but she might have been a wall
against which a pack of schoolboys newly freed
from classes are bouncing an India rubber ball.
Her breastplate had been heated, as we read,
in the fires of Hell and then, if I recall,
tempered in Avernus' waters—so they
hit but then bounce harmlessly away.
- 85 She's now at the end of the field and lets the horse
rest a moment. Then she turns to face
those who survived the first pass. This is worse,
for as she thunders back she turns the place
into an abattoir and with the force
of her sharp sword she lops off, in one case,
a head, and then in another, a shoulder and arm.
She has a spectacular way of doing harm.
- 86 One of the foe she cuts across the waist
so that his head and torso fall to the ground,
while in the saddle his hips and his legs, encased
in armor of course, continue to move around.
He looks like a broken toy some child embraced
too roughly, or an image that can be found
in churches sometimes, a waxen figure that
has a little wick to light coming out of his hat.
- 87 The last of the nine is terrified and running
away. She chases him down and with two hands
delivers a blow that is absolutely stunning
and serves as the most effective of reprimands.
She cleaves his skull lengthwise as in those cunning
figures of the head you find on stands
in doctor's offices. The model explains
what the parts are from the skull inside to the brains.

- 88 That knight in black is the only one left now,
and from a distance he has been watching all
the action, taking careful note of how
well the challenger fights as teammates fall
one after another. With a slight bow
he advances. He wants no one to call
the courtesy that he has been showing here
anything else—reluctance, say, or fear.
- 89 He holds up his hand to signal that he has
something to say before they proceed. “Sir,”
he says, entirely ignorant as
to Marfisa’s actual gender. Addressing her,
he says, “You must be tired, for this was
a strenuous exercise. Might you prefer
to rest until tomorrow? In that way
you will be fresh and readier than today.
- 90 “My own honor is also involved, for I
should have little credit for winning against one who
has already killed nine adversaries. Why
not put this off, for your sake and mine, too?”
Marfisa replies, “I was not tired by
these warming-up exercises—as I think you
will discover very soon to your dismay.
But I thank you for the offer anyway.
- 91 “So much of the day is left to us that we
might as well take advantage of it. To spend it
lolling about and resting? That would be
indeed a shame. Let us proceed and end it
efficiently.” “The light that remains, I agree,
is enough,” the knight replies. “We need not amend it—
or you don’t at any rate. Sunset in the west
will be after I’ve sent you to your rest.”

- 92 Two lances are brought, the size of spars for large ships, and the black knight lets Marfisa choose which one she'd like. They wait for the signal to charge, and when the trumpet sounds the contenders use their rowelled spurs to their horses' flanks to urge them forward. The poundings of their hoofs produce a trembling in the earth and even the air as the two knights are approaching each other there.
- 93 The onlookers hold their breath as these two aim their lances and draw closer. Marfisa's intent is to knock the black knight out of his saddle. The same thought is in his mind. The tournament is one of strength and vigor and each would claim the other's life and glory from the event. The lances hit at the same time and collapse at once into splinters—or toothpicks, perhaps.
- 94 You'd think they were not made of sturdy oak but willow or even balsa wood, the way they shatter. But the matter is no joke. Both horses fall from the great impact that they gave and received at this awesome double stroke. The fighters arise however. They're okay, but each is shocked. This kind of thing has never happened to them before. Well, hardly ever.
- 95 The thing about being very good is that you seldom come up against equals, let alone those who are even better—there are so few. It's tough to improve, then, when you're on your own. But neither, I think, was grateful for this new and splendid opponent. Unhorsed and lying prone, one is much less concerned with the adept stranger than the unpleasant possibility of danger.

- 96 They both spring up and on foot renew the fight,
thrusting and cutting, parrying and all
those intricate maneuvers any knight
has trained for. The advantage is hard to call,
but certainly it is noisy, as the bright
armor resounds like anvils with the fall
of the heavy blades upon it. Boom and bang
and then, as an antiphon, a double clang.
- 97 The maiden's arm is strong but so is his,
and they give and take in fairly equal measure.
In the annals of great combats, surely this
deserves a place of honor. It would please your
most demanding fan. The struggle is
spectacular. Later on, when they have leisure,
the women in the large crowd will discuss
those finer points that may have eluded us.
- 98 All that needs be said here is that they
seem not to have grown weary, although it has been
quite a long time now that this strenuous fray
has been going on. Neither is giving in
or showing that he (or she) is *fatigué*.
Dozens, hundreds of blows, but do they begin
to slow a little? Their feet can still move fast.
Both of them seem as though they're able to last.
- 99 The general consensus is that these
two are the best warriors they have ever
seen or can recall. Their capacities
of physical strength and stamina have never
before been equaled. "It is a good thing that he's
waited till now," Marfisa thinks, "not clever
perhaps, but courtly. I could not have withstood
those nine and him as well. He's very good."

100 And for his part, the knight is thinking that he
is fortunate this opponent did not accept
that offer of rest. He is enough for me
to handle even now, but had he slept
and refreshed himself, this passage at arms would be
worse. Wearied now and aching, he kept
a confident demeanor and even a smile.
To show his doubts would not have been his style.

101 Back and forth, attack and counterattack,
the fight kept going until the shadows grew
longer and deeper. As the home team, the black
knight thought it was now only right to renew
his offer. "Sir, as you can see, we lack
sufficient light. And it seems to me that you
and I are even still. What I suggest
is that you reconsider my offer of rest.

102 "I'd be content to prolong your life for one
night only. Alas, I cannot extend that time
because of all these pitiless females who run
the country. Surely, you understand that I'm
bound by their strange laws. What we have begun
we'll finish tomorrow. But to prevent some crime
against you or your people, I invite
you all to stay with me and spend the night.

103 "Elsewhere you might not be safe, I fear. Those nine
men you have killed were each the consort to
ten women who now hate you and have malign
plans, I am sure. That's ninety women who
want to inflict their vengeance. To foil their design
I offer you, your companions, and your crew
my hospitality and, of course, protection,
to which, I hope, you will make no objection."

- 104 In answer, Marfisa said, "I accept with great pleasure. Your faith and your heart are every bit as admirable as your courage and skill. I await the morrow with every confidence that it will be your last day on this earth that fate has allotted you. We can go on or quit, as you please. Neither one needs any excuse for offering or accepting a short truce.
- 105 "I appreciate the consideration that you have shown, and I am also unhappy that one of us must kill the other. But we must do what the laws require. They cannot be undone. Each of us has earned the other's true respect. But for the moment we'll put our fun on hold. We can continue with our fight tomorrow in a brighter and clearer light."
- 106 The combat was thus suspended until dawn should approach from the Ganges westward. It remained without decision as to which had been on the verge of victory. The knight explained that Aquilant, Grifon, the captain, and everyone from the ship was welcome. He said that he maintained an elaborate establishment and they should follow along as he showed them the way.
- 107 They proceeded then by torchlight down the hill to a royal palace with many apartments and rooms splendid in their décor. It was not until they removed their helmets or, rather, had their grooms help them do this as they often will, that the penny dropped. For both of them, one assumes. She was astonished that he was a mere youth of no more than eighteen years to tell the truth.

108 How can such a powerful knight be so
young as this lad? He, on the other hand,
looked at her hair, her face, and saw that his foe
was a woman, for heaven's sake. You can understand
that this was something of an emotional blow.
His name? It is a reasonable demand,
the answer to which I hope you anticipate
learning in the next canto, but it grows late.

Canto Ventesimo

- 1 In ancient days women were able to do
extraordinary things to impress the world
by their excellence in arms (to name but two,
I offer Camilla and Harpalyce, who hurled
spears and wielded swords). And not a few
were followers of the Muses and uncurled
their scrolls as Sappho did with uneven lines,
and Corinna, and their light forever shines.
- 2 Women have achieved in every art
and craft the highest distinction, and their fame
is great indeed. They're strong and they are smart.
Without them history couldn't have been the same.
I rather think it is envy on men's part
that keeps concealed the honor and acclaim
they have deserved. If their work is not taught in schools,
it is because men are jealous—or are fools.
- 3 In our own age, fair women of talent and
worth are everywhere and deserve that pen
and paper record their prowess and their grand
achievements, so that in the future, when

people study our times they will understand
the excellence of the ladies. Only then
will envious anti-feminist chatter at last
cease, as even Marfisa's fame is surpassed.

- 4 Speaking of whom, we remember where we were:
she is more than happy to tell the youth
who she is, if he will in turn tell her
his name. They agree at once. She says, "In truth,
I am Marfisa." This causes rather a stir.
They all know that name, although it would be uncouth
to react too much. (People tend to blame us
if we make a fuss about meeting somebody famous.)
- 5 Now it's the youth's turn and he commences
with a kind of prolegomenon. He says,
"Each of you—I believe there will be a consensus—
has heard my family name, which has earned some praise
in France and Spain and all over Europe (immense as
that continent is) and India, and, as the phrase
goes, 'all over the world.' From Clermont arose
the knight who killed Lord Almont, as everyone knows,
- 6 "and Chiarello and King Mambrino as well,
and undid both their kingdoms. Of his line
was my mother to whom Duke Amon came, as they tell
the story, and thereafter she bore him a fine
son—which was myself. Since her death knell
a year ago, I left there: my design
has been to go to France to seek my own
people, so that I will no longer be alone.
- 7 "But I could not complete my voyage: an ill
wind blew me off course and to this dread
place. It was ten months ago, and I still
tally the days like a prisoner. Nothing is said

of Guidon Selvaggi's glory, but soon the world will
have learned my name. Argilon is dead,
of Melibea, by my hand and the ten
knights he had with him, all of them competent men.

- 8 “The test of the ten maidens I passed, too,
so that I now have the ten I chose,
the loveliest and the noblest that you
could find here. I rule over them, I suppose,
because they gave me the scepter—as they will do
to anyone else who comes here to oppose
me and the other nine men and survives.
He'll take our places, our women, and our lives.”
- 9 The knights ask Guidon why there are so few
males in the region. How did this come to be?
They also want to know if it is true
that husbands must defer obediently
to wives as, elsewhere, wives are subject to
their husbands' wishes. Guidon says that he
is more than willing to tell them what he has heard
of how this came to be and what occurred.
- 10 “It starts with the Trojan war, which as you know
took ten years, and then another ten for the men
to come home to their wives—who in that slow
passage of time had felt betrayed and then
taken young lovers so as not to go
to cold and lonely beds. Now, back again,
the husbands find that their houses swarm with small
children with whom they have no ties at all.
- 11 “A delicate situation, you will agree.
By common consent, the men who had gone to the war
forgave their errant wives, because they could see
that twenty years was a very long time for

a woman to have to sleep alone. They would be willing to start a new page. But on the score of those children, they said it didn't make much sense for bastard sons to be raised at their expense.

- 12 “Some are exposed on mountainsides to die, although some their mothers contrive to hide away and somehow keep them alive. But by and by these also have to leave, for if they stay they will be killed. They variously try to live as soldiers, potters, farmers, or they are shepherds or they join some foreign court. They make their way in careers of every sort.
- 13 “Among these wanderers is one of the sons of cruel Clytemnestra, of whom you've heard. He's eighteen, fresh as a lily, and he stuns all those who see him. What this youth preferred to try his hand at (a streak of madness runs through the entire family) was, in a word, a life of piracy—so he recruits a hundred other men for these pursuits.
- 14 “It happened just then that the people of Crete had driven out the barbarous Idomeneo who had sacrificed his son to Neptune. Given their need to establish a government, what they do is hire Phalanto (that's his name) to live in and guard the city of Dicta, whereunto all the best people of Crete come for pleasure, sport, romance, and the getting and spending of treasure.
- 15 “The habit in Crete, which had fallen, I am afraid, elsewhere into desuetude, was to treat strangers extremely well, and these they made particularly welcome. The women would greet

the handsome young men with a warmth that they displayed
in every possible way. It wasn't discreet:
they were most forthcoming in a delight
they demonstrated by day and also by night.

- 16 “This, I have no doubt, was the life that these
young men had dreamed about as privateers,
foot-loose and fancy-free as the wayward breeze.
It was better, they thought, than all the other careers
they might have taken up in the Cyclades
or other islands. Their duties, it appears,
were not at all demanding until the sun
set in the west, and then it was all fun.
- 17 “At last the war for which they had been employed
came to an end, as happens sometimes, with a truce,
and the easy duty the troops had so much enjoyed
was over, because there wasn't any use
to paying soldiers in peacetime to keep them deployed.
They're cuddly, yes, but that is not an excuse.
The women, weeping and wailing, begged them to stay,
but the men couldn't afford that without pay.
- 18 “Imagine the conversations, as one by one
the women pleaded to men who insisted that they
had to go. So the women decided to run
off with them. What can one possibly say?
To leave their husbands, their parents, and jettison
their children? Astonishing! They took away
gold, gems, and plunder, too. Not a man
in Crete had any inkling of this plan!
- 19 “Phalanto had picked just the right time to sail,
and the winds were brisk that carried them out to sea
at a fair clip. Back in Crete, they wail
and rage, but the women get away scot-free.

On water there isn't any kind of trail.
They reach at last the shore of the place where we
are now, uninhabited, hidden away
from the rest of the world. Here they can rest and play.

- 20 "A paradise, at least for the first ten days
or so, but then the pleasure begins to pale
as it can with frequent repetition. The haze
of amorous ease clears. Appetites fail.
The men begin to discuss the various ways
they might conclude this episode and sail
off to other adventures, satiety
having whetted their appetites for some variety.
- 21 "As long as they had planned to leave, in which
case they wouldn't look good at all, they decided
to take along those gems and the gold, the rich
plunder with which those women had provided
themselves—to steal from thieves is just a switch
of possession but hardly a crime. One night they glided
out of the harbor to go wherever they'd want to
and it's said that they built the city of Taranto.
- 22 "The women, as you can imagine, were thunderstruck
and for some days stood like statues, unable to move,
speak, or comprehend their terrible luck.
All that they were and had, they'd given to love,
and they found that they were abandoned now and stuck
in this barren place. What could they do to improve
their circumstances? That was the pressing question.
They were ready to listen to any kind of suggestion.
- 23 "Some proposed that they go back to Crete
to beg forgiveness from their husbands and
their fathers, admit they were wrong, and in defeat
hope for mercy. But on the other hand

there were some who said that they would rather meet death than grovel. They could walk from the sand deeper and deeper into the sea where they might find some peace and wash their sins away.

24 “The third idea was that they should roam the streets of the world as beggars and whores, or even slaves, for life is precious, even in one’s defeats. Guilt, like illness, is something that one braves and learns to endure, so that on the balance sheets the debt one owes diminishes. One behaves as well as one can. Given the possible choices, there were many different views and many voices.

25 “But finally Orontea, who could trace her ancestry back to Minos, took the floor, the youngest and most beautiful of face and figure. She had been a virgin before she came to love Phalanto. For his embrace she had left her father. Now she was heartsore and spoke in righteous anger saying that they, more sinned against than sinning, ought to stay.

26 “This was a fertile place with pleasant air, well-watered by clear streams. The harbor was a refuge in storms for sailors. Instead of despair they ought to be cheered and confident because they now had a chance to start afresh and share not only building a city but writing its laws so as to allow them to extract revenge on men for the dreadful way they act.

27 “Her idea is Draconian but feels right to the other women. What she would do is wait for ships to come and, when their keels have touched the shingle, kill the entire crew

and loot the cargo. There will be no appeals
for mercy that the women will listen to.
And then? Using a mild intensifier
she says they'll set the fucking ships on fire.

- 28 “This is what they decided to do. And soon
they learned that when the weather was turning bad
they could go down to the harbor. An opportune
wind would bring them the victims that they had
expected from the vessels they could expugn.
Not to be interrupted in this mad
effort, they left no one to spread the news
to any other captains or their crews.
- 29 “Thus they lived in an odd gynocracy,
enemies to the whole masculine gender,
but they came in time to realize that it would be
a short-lived enterprise. They had to amend or
bend the rules or else mortality
would surely doom the city. To this tender
issue they turned their attention to invent
a way to reproduce, even if that meant
- 30 “men must be admitted—at least a few.
Over the years they selected handsome knights
who were strong enough to perform, as they had to do,
with ten of the women without their appetites
and powers failing them. This adds up to
a hundred men for a thousand women’s delights
or anyway fertilization. On that pretext
they wanted men one might call oversexed.
- 31 “Those who failed the test were at first beheaded.
The lucky few were made to swear an oath
that they would be the ones to inflict this dreaded
punishment for later arrivals. Loath

to undergo it themselves, those who had wedded
ten women and plighted with them their troth
agreed to carry out this unpleasant task,
although they thought it was a lot to ask.

- 32 “The women, as you would expect, soon became great
with child and then began to deliver, sons
as well as daughters. There was of course debate
as to what to do about them, lest everyone’s
power be jeopardized—or gravitate
to the growing number of males. The Amazons’
solution was to deal with them while they
were young—that is, to kill them or send them away.
- 33 “Had they been able to keep up their numbers, they
would not have allowed even one to survive, but this
was implausible on its face. It was okay
to keep one son, but not any more, so his
brothers were given up and sent away
to be traded for girls. Or sold as slaves. It is
extreme, I think you’ll agree, but it shows their zeal
or the depth of the anger toward men that all of them feel.
- 34 “But if this is the way they treated their own, then what
could strangers expect who showed up on their shore?
Every man was condemned—no “if” or “but.”
The only change that they adopted was for
the method of the executions. Not
a basic alteration, I grant, but more
cosmetic or aesthetic. It was one
that masked their cruel procedure with some fun.
- 35 “The way it was at first was if there were ten
or twenty that they’d taken at one time,
they locked them up in a dungeon cell and then
took one a day to sacrifice for the crime

of having come into the world as a specimen
of the male sex. Each of them had to climb
up to the temple Orontea had built
to Revenge and there be punished for his guilt.

- 36 “They would pick at random one who had to kill
the others, which meant that he would be the last
to die. That’s how it worked for years until
Elbanio came, brave, strong, and steadfast,
of Hercules’ noble line—but even still
they took him unawares and of course they cast
him into that cell where, as he would learn,
he’d die on the altar when it was his turn.
- 37 “He was a handsome fellow and such a good
speaker that his words might melt the heart
of a desert asp as he made himself understood.
Or to put it simply, he had mastered the art
of persuasion. His charm and eloquence surely would
have been reported to Alessandra, the smart
daughter of Orontea, who, though old,
was still alive—and ruled, as we are told.
- 38 “Nearly all the others who came along
from Crete with her were gone, but there were more
who had been born. The settlement was strong,
although there were ten anvils waiting for
one hammer. And even if they knew it was wrong,
these men had the dismal duty of killing the poor
arrivals whom the storms had blown their way
and lived—although not long—to rue the day.
- 39 “Alessandra wanted to see this youth about
whom people spoke in such enthusiastic
terms. She begged her mother to let her flout
the rules or let them be a little elastic.

Her mother assented, although she had some doubt
that this was a good idea. The girl's fantastic
expectations would either be excessive,
or else they wouldn't, and she could become possessive.

- 40 “He wins her heart, of course. The prisoner takes
the jailor captive. She cannot leave him there.
He sees this and with a winning smile he makes
a modest suggestion, asking if somewhere
there is pity in her heart that sometimes aches,
could she not listen and grant him his modest prayer
for life—that he would of course devote to her
as payment in part for the debt that he'd incur?
- 41 “‘Since hearts seem to be grudging here,’ he said,
‘I do not ask for my life outright, but merely
that as a knight in arms I may go head
to head on the field with some brave opponent, for clearly
that is better than for my blood to be shed
on an altar where I'm a victim in some severely
cruel ceremony. With my last breath
I'll thank you for an honorable death.’
- 42 “Alessandra's eyes glistened with tears
in pity for the persuasive man, and she
replied, ‘This land of ours surely appears
to be more cruel than any other, but we
are not all Medeas. Though young in years,
I still have my own views. I do not agree
with the imposition of our stringent laws,
which might be amended for a sufficient cause.
- 43 “‘Even if sometimes in the past I have been
as cruel as the others, my heart is softer now.
Because of your courage and honesty, you win
my compassion and respect. I wonder how

I can extricate you from the fix you're in.
There is no authority that could allow
suspension of the rules in a single case—
even for one with such a handsome face.

- 44 “If I could purchase your life with my own, I would,
but whom could I ask if there is a way to arrange
such a trade? The traditions here have stood
for a long time, even if they seem strange.
Our rage at men and the history of bad blood
between your sex and our own will not change.
But having said all that, I still will try
to do what I can to alter the way you die.
- 45 “My fear is that if I ask for a dispensation,
they may, in their habitual suspicion
of men and their behavior toward our nation,
contrive somehow to worsen your condition
and find a more painful death of longer duration,
which would fill me with regret and much contrition.’
‘Even if they had me fight ten men,’
Elbanio replied, ‘I’d die happy then.’
- 46 “Alessandra answered only with a sigh
and went away, but it was, she realized,
a talking point at least, and she might try
to interest the other women, who, surprised,
might change their minds, for if he didn’t die
after fighting ten men as advertised,
he would have proved his merit. She went to
her mother to ask her whether this wasn’t true.
- 47 “Queen Orontea called her council to meet
and discuss the matter. ‘We should get the best
man we can find as a guard. If he can defeat
ten fighters seriatim without a rest,

we ought to put such valor to use. The effete
and cowardly we can kill. But such a test
will separate the wheat from the chaff, or the sheep
from the goats, and will make it clear to us whom to keep.

- 48 “‘I offer this proposal,’ she explained,
‘because we have a man who offers to kill
ten men. If he achieved this and remained
alive, such a triumph of stamina and will
ought to be rewarded.’ And she maintained,
‘An empty boast he’s unable to fulfill
could provide us with entertainment. You and I
may watch and applaud as, painfully, he’ll die.’
- 49 “To this, one of the elder women replied,
‘Our dealings with men were not for the protection
they could give us. It cannot be denied
that we have power enough, and our subjection
to men is what we always have defied.
Had we been able somehow (genetic selection?)
by parthenogenesis to reproduce,
men would be absolutely without use!
- 50 “‘We are not without brains, and we are strong
and can fend—and defend—for ourselves, perfectly well.
The traditional domination by men is wrong,
and we can set an example that women will tell
each other about for encouragement along
the decades and the centuries. Let us not sell
ourselves short. This idea, if I hear it
correctly, insults our powers and noble spirit.
- 51 “‘We need them to sire children, but let it be clear
that that is their only purpose. Let them be
lazy, shiftless, and decorative. They’re here
on sufferance merely. The manliness that we

want is only for nighttime use. We'd fear that the strength this man is claiming might interfere with the governance of our city. We want no mate who might try to presume or dominate.

- 52 “Such a man is a fundamental threat to everything we stand for. If he can dispatch ten strong men in the field, what will we get at home? If the ten we have here now were a match for him, they would have taken, without much sweat, the rule of the city for themselves. You watch what happens if you let such a man as this into our midst. The city will soon be his.
- 53 “There’s another aspect of this to which I call your attention, which is that if he kills the ten men, his achievement will leave a hundred women, all of whom, deprived of husbands, will ask what then they are to do for consortium. The animal spirits required to service a woman and when he is done, do the same for ninety-nine more women . . . I venture to say that this is quite uncommon.’
- 54 “This was Artemia’s dour view and her argument had a certain logic, but still, Orontea asked if they might not prefer to solve the problem another way. To kill such a one on the altar as if he were a bullock or sheep was rather a bitter pill. She had, of course, her daughter’s desires in mind, for mothers, even here, are not unkind.
- 55 “The question for the senate was decided mostly because of Elbanio’s great beauty by which most of the younger women were guided. The older ones declared that it was their duty

to resist change. But Orontea presided
and she was the one to settle the dispute: he
would face ten men as he had offered and then
would visit the women—not a hundred but ten.

- 56 “So he was, after their fashion, given a pardon,
although the trial he faced was hardly easy.
He was let out of jail, although they kept a guard on
watch. Some were expecting the obsequies he
would earn for himself, perhaps at the tilting yard on
the next day against ten men (his breezy
boast you’ll recall) or else during the night
where he had to display a different kind of might.
- 57 “It’s hardly a suspenseful moment, is it?
He does well on the field, and then later on
in bed as well, pleasing at every visit.
Orontea gives her blessing upon
his marriage to her daughter, the exquisite
Alessandra (and the other nine who have gone
to test him). The match was hardly made in heaven,
but they lived together happily—all eleven.
- 58 “Orontea left him and her daughter heirs
to the city that bears the daughter’s name and decreed
that his exception should now be the rule. (It spares
those who can kill ten men and then succeed
with ten women at night.) Those who, unawares,
are driven ashore are given the choice—to bleed
on the altar or else to take the test and try
to see if they can manage not to die.
- 59 “It isn’t, however, a lifetime appointment. If any
challenger comes along to try his skill
the title moves on to the next contender when he
kills the champion and nine more. One will

sooner or later as, again and again, he
tries to maintain the position that others would fill.
Barbaric? If you think so, I agree.
And the title-holder, at least for the moment, is me.

60 “For two thousand years, this is the way it has been
going on. And the custom, as you see,
is still observed. And few days go by in
which some traveler neither chooses to be
sacrificed, nor tries on the field to win
his life. It’s rare to defeat even two or three
of the ten, I’m afraid. And then there’s the second quest,
and one in a thousand perhaps gets through that test.

61 “Some do emerge triumphant, but these you can
count on the fingers of just one hand. Of these
I remember Argilon, a powerful man,
whose rule did not last long, for a contrary breeze
drove me here. His valedictorian,
I sent him to the next world. At his decease,
I succeeded. But I find the life quite grim
and often wish that I had died with him.

62 “The pleasures are all one could ask for, or even more
than a healthy man could dream about. The food,
the clothing, the jewels . . . But what is it all for
when one is deprived of liberty? No other good
counts when that is lost, and my heart is sore
afflicted. I am a slave here, and I would
rather struggle to earn a crust of bread
than loll about here, useless and overfed.

63 “The bloom of my youth withers here in base
and sordid leisure, as one otiose day
follows another. I remember the hard won praise
of my kinfolk and it indicts me. That I stay

here with these women in this peculiar place
fills me with disgust, despair, dismay . . .
I torture myself by thinking what I ought
to accomplish in the world. But I am caught.

- 64 “I am a war horse put out to grass for some defect that is not my fault. My blood is suited for battle, but owing to some dumb flaw in my marking, they think that I’m no good. It’s easy enough in the meadow, but the drum rolls are not for me, and although I would go to the war, they laugh at me and I hang my head and wish that I might die.”
- 65 Guidon then fell silent, shaking his head and cursing the day that he had won the bout with Argilon and his people. What he said Astolfo had listened to carefully. Without doubt he was Amon’s son and had been bred of the same blood as Astolfo’s. He spoke out and revealed to his cousin, after having waited until his tale was done, that they were related.
- 66 “I am,” he said, “Astolfo, your English kin,” and he embraced the young man, shedding a tear. “Had your mother put some tangible token in your hands, that would not have been any more clear or reliable proof of your lineage than there has been today on the field of honor. I am sincere when I say that you are of Amon’s blood and I am delighted to recognize the family tie.”
- 67 Guidon, however, is glum, and sorry to see a kinsman in such a circumstance. Either way it can’t be good, tomorrow, for if it be Guidon’s triumph, then on the following day

Astolfo will perish. But if he goes free
it means that Guidon will have died—so if they
have a relationship, it is his belief
that however warm it may be, it must be brief.

68 He is also filled with concern about what could well
happen, which is that Marfisa could kill him,
but what would happen afterwards when they propel
her to those women's beds? The prospects are dim
that she will succeed with them, and when they tell
what happened, she will find her interim
victory is useless. They will enslave
her friends, and then kill her, however brave.

69 For their part, Marfisa and her companions were
impressed with Guidon's valor and courtesy,
and it seemed to them—it surely seemed to her—
that they could only continue to live if he
died, which would be a shame. She would prefer
to die along with him, unless there be
some other solution to their awkward plight
by which both he and she could come out all right.

70 She said to Guidon then, "Let us unite
and break out of here by force." He shook his head,
and answered, "It cannot work, for it is quite
impossible. No matter which of us is dead
tomorrow, nobody leaves here. It is the height
of folly even to think of it." She said,
"I trust in my sword: with it I've always made
a path through any tangle with its blade.

71 "We have proved our strength to one another in
the arena and we both have the courage for all
exploits. Tomorrow, then, let us begin
when they have assembled there, and let us fall

upon them and kill them. Most, like gelatin,
will quiver and flee, although there will be a small
number we'll have to fight, but we are strong
and armed, and we are right and they are wrong.

- 72 “We'll leave the corpses out for the vultures to pick
and we'll set the city afire before we leave.”
“I'll join with you of course,” Guidon was quick
to reply, “but still I find it hard to conceive
of a victory. That crowd, which is very quick,
must be ten thousand strong, I do believe,
and there are also guards for the walls and port.
The odds, in other words, are hardly short.”
- 73 Marfisa answered, “Let them be even more
than Xerxes brought to Greece, and let them show
the spirit of Lucifer's angels in his war
with Paradise. I am not worried though.
If you are with me, then you are not for
them. We'll kill all that we can, I know.”
Guidon agreed. “It's not a perfect plan,
but who has a better one? I am your man!”
- 74 “Or, wait, I do have another idea that could
help us. Men are never allowed to go
onto the beach. But one of my ladies in good
faith has told me that she loves me so
that she would help me escape from here—if I would
only take her with me. For her show
of faith, my heart is full of love, and I
can see a way out that's surely worth a try.
- 75 “She detests my slavery here as much
as I do myself and wants also to be rid
of her competitors who have been such
a trial to her. Her plan is that at mid-

night she will have a brigantine or ketch
ready to depart and, once she did
this for us we'd go to the ship and board,
making use, if we had to, of the sword.

76 “All of us gathered together in one band
might have at least a chance of getting through
to the ship that would be waiting on the strand.
If we are stopped, we shall be ready to do
what must be done to escape this dreadful land
of most peculiar practices. We are few
and they are many, but with luck we may
reach that vessel and on it sail away.”

77 “You do as you think best,” Marfisa said,
“but as for me, I'd rather kill them all
than be seen to scurry away from here in the dead
of night or show what anyone could call
fear. I'll go in daylight with my head
held high and, if that way I happen to fall,
my honor shall not have appeared to compromise
in the world's—or, more important—in my own eyes.

78 “If they knew that I'm a woman, I am sure
that I should be welcomed and honored. I could be
one of the council members, perhaps, but you're
my companions. We came together and we
will leave together. It would be very poor
behavior for me just to stand by and see
you all put into slavery or be killed.
I do not think my conscience could be stilled.”

79 Pursuing this line of thought, Marfisa reflected
that loyalty to her companions might bear upon
her views about what exit was correct. It
was how she'd rather go, but few or none

of her good friends and shipmates could be expected to share her love of battle. So she is won over to Guidon's cautious plan and he's delighted—as are they all—that she agrees.

80 Guidon contrives a moment to speak that night with Aleria (the faithful wife) and he has no need to persuade her, for she is quite eager for this. She equips a ship for sea and takes her jewels and treasures. To prepare for the fight she collects from the palace the swords and shields that she knows the merchants and sailors will need. To use these things on a voyage for plunder is her excuse.

81 Some were asleep. Others were restless or eager and stood peering out through the window at the night, the excitement of the next day trumping fatigue or erasing it. Others, stoic, waited for light and buckled on their armor, or helped a colleague, or encouraged each other about the coming fight. But these sporadic conversations ceased when signs of redness began to show in the east.

82 Up in the sky, Calisto had barely begun to plow her furrow that heralds the sunrise when drums were sounding, summoning everyone back to the arena. It's no surprise that the women were eager to see the bloody fun from which, at the end, one, at the most, would rise. They were like a swarm of bees around a hive before they take off for new ground.

83 Trumpets, drums, sackbuts, and other makers of noise thumped and tweedled as women came to the great square. All the movers and shakers and of course the common folk shared in the same

excitement. Who will win? There are some takers for bets either way. (For them it is a game.) Meanwhile, Astolfo and Sansonetto appear with Guidon and Marfisa in the rear.

- 84 The others are there as well, some riding horses and others on foot. The layout of the town is such—it was designed so—that it forces them to go through the square. There's no way around. Guidon explains this, and naturally the remorse is great, for the size of the crowd, to judge by the sound, is huge. Hundreds, thousands, all in the way between them and the ship down in the bay.
- 85 Guidon urged his companions to move along with all possible haste, but this made clear his intention to escape and the angry throng took out their weapons in order to interfere with an action that seemed to them rebellious and wrong. Arrows began to fly through the air and here and there were the gasps of the wounded. At this attack Guidon, Marfisa, and all the rest struck back.
- 86 The arrows were everywhere as thick as hail and the crowd in its great numbers and hot rage were just too much for a small group to prevail against. On all sides now as they rampage, they bring down good men who, though they may flail about, cannot protect themselves or engage so many at once. It seemed as if they faced not only death but, worse, to be disgraced.
- 87 Had it not been for the excellent breastplates they all wore, there would have been many more casualties. But even so, the fates were hardly smiling. Sansonetto's war-

horse was killed beneath him. Far from the gates
Marfisa's steed was unable to move. Before
it got any worse, Astolfo decided at last
that the time had come for his horn to sound a blast.

88 He puts the horn to his lips and starts to blow
and the earth and the sky both tremble at the sound.
Fear strikes the hearts of those in the crowd and they throw
themselves in panic pell-mell to the ground
where they are trampled and many die below
the feet of others. The guards who stood around
the gate have fled as far and fast as their feet
could take them in their terrified retreat.

89 Have you ever seen a building on fire and men
and women in terror throwing themselves from high
windows to escape the flames but then
hit the ground and just as surely die?
Moments before the fire woke them, when
they slept sound in their beds with danger nigh,
they could not have imagined this extreme
of suffering—not even in a dream.

90 Looking down from above you would see the tide
of people surge one way and then another.
There are screams and groans and curses from every side.
The press is such that frightened women smother
their little babies. It's an unqualified
catastrophe. Young children call out for their mother
who lies not far away, dead in the crush,
as the mob continues in its frantic push.

91 You hear sometimes the phrase that people use
about the "cowardly rabble," and how they are
faint-hearted and foolish. Never try to excuse
or defend them for in fires or times of war

that is their nature. They run like rabbits whose nests have been disturbed. They are as poor in spirit as those beasts. And that loud horn was the worst noise that they'd heard since they were born.

- 92 But what about Marfisa and Guidon?
Or Oliver's sons, Grifon and Aquilant?
They are terrified too, and with what speed on foot they can manage, they try to increase their scant distance from the noise while their terrors feed on further bone-shattering blasts they simply can't escape. They scatter, each in another direction, searching in vain for any kind of protection.
- 93 Look at them go! If we are far enough away it has a comic aspect. One climbs high on the mountain, another takes to the rough woods. And that poor dear! Just watch her run for ten days without stopping, which is tough. Some go mad and in their oblivion find a kind of safety. Their blank stares still see a crowd in the town's now empty squares.
- 94 Marfisa, Guidon, and the rest at least had some notion of where they wanted to go, and in their agitation which increased their speed they made their way to the port below where the sailors also had gone—as a driven beast will head for its lair. The merchants? They always know where the bargains are and what to do: their best and only chance was to stay with the crew.
- 95 Aleria had the ship she had promised ready between the castles, and in great haste they all clambered aboard on a somewhat unsteady gangplank, managing somehow not to fall.

As soon as all were assembled, the captain said he wanted the hawsers dropped. And on the tall masts the sails are raised and the crew all row making a wake behind them as they go.

- 96 But what about Astolfo? Where is he?
He has been running around the city with loud blasts on his horn from which the inhabitants flee. Some had jumped into privies, not too proud to endure a little filth if they could be hidden away. The population is cowed absolutely. He puts his horn away and goes to the ship he thinks is still on the quay.
- 97 But there's nothing except blue water and far away in the offing is the ship which is proceeding under full sail. What on earth were they thinking? Couldn't they count? He will be needing another mode of transportation today and must make a new plan while they are speeding off toward France. He thinks, next time, he'll warn his friends before he uses his magic horn.
- 98 It's a long journey he has to make, but we need not worry much for Astolfo's sake. The infidels and barbarians he will see are dangerous, no doubt, but he will take his time and journey at leisure, quite carefree, knowing that a blast of his horn can make the most aggressive crowds disperse and run. It's not only comforting but even fun.
- 99 Let us rather return our attention to those on the ship who are relieved that the noise no more sounds in their ears. Ashamed of themselves we suppose, they avoid one another's eyes and stare at the floor

(or the deck, I should say) as if they were doing a close inspection of the planking. It is a sore subject but there's nothing else to turn the conversation to. Their faces burn.

- 100 The captain is making progress as Cyprus and Rhodes pass abeam and then astern. There are a hundred islands drifting backwards. (The land doesn't move; it's the ship.) Cape Malea, by far the trickiest part of the passage you understand, is now behind them. He sees the irregular Sicilian coast and then the pleasant shore of Italy that he has been longing for.
- 101 They reach La Spezia, the captain's home port where he lands and gives thanks to God for his safe return. The party finds another vessel there ready to sail for France, and when they learn this they are delighted. The fare is fair and they put out with Italy far astern and in short order they approach Marseilles and are happy after traveling all that weilles.
- 102 Had Bradamante, who ruled the region, been at home she would have invited them to visit. But she was out in the field somewhere. At an inn Marfisa bade farewell to the group, for is it honorable for knights of genuine valor to stay together? The exquisite fallow deer and the tender starlings flock in a way that the lone falcon or eagle would mock.
- 103 Lions and tigers also live alone, and she would do the same, she maintained, and go her own way. The others thought her tone was a little la-di-da and perhaps *de trop*,

but they wished her well as she set off for unknown adventures. For the others, the status quo seemed not disgraceful and surely more pleasant. They continued to travel together all the next day.

- 104 Late in the afternoon, when they had gone a goodly distance, they saw as they rounded a hill an imposing castle, the lord of which, upon seeing them, opened the gates and with good will—or at least a show of it—welcomed everyone and invited them in to eat and drink their fill and then, because they must be tired, rest in comfortable beds. They acquiesced.
- 105 Why not, after all? But if men always meant what they said (or said what they meant) then life would be much more simple. Into the castle they went, having not the least suspicion that he might have been feigning. No presentiment crossed the mind of any of them. We'll see in a later canto how they were wrong and how unfortunate. But we'll follow Marfisa for now.
- 106 She crosses the Durance (it's in Provence) and the Rhone, and then the Saône, clippety-clopping all day, and she's at the foot of a mountain where, all alone, there's an old woman in black, who, I must say, seems very tired and sad. This is the crone we've met before. You do remember the way Orlando hung those thieves up in the trees in Terzodecimo? She was connected with these.
- 107 The woman is, for reasons I'll later discuss, in fear of her life, and therefore she has been going on little used roads, rough and circuitous, trying not to be seen or noticed, owing

to worry that people may mean her harm. She was relieved to see that Marfisa was not showing local insignnia, and therefore she strode out from the bushes to wait there in the road.

108 Did I mention that there was a stream? There was a stream, and what the woman asked, when Marfisa was close enough to greet and speak to with extreme deference, was her help in getting across to the other bank—which certainly did not seem an extraordinary request. (But one never knows.) How long could it possibly take? And bear in mind that Marfisa, all her life, had always been kind.

109 So long story short, she invites her up on the horse's croup and takes her across to the other side. That's all the woman asked for, but nothing forces Marfisa to set her down there. Could she ride a little further, perhaps? The crone endorses this fine idea. She is most gratified. Marfisa, very generously, will let her stay on the crupper until the road gets better.

110 So they're going along, the two of them, and they see another knight approaching in fine clothes and impressive gleaming armor. With him he has a squire and also (as you may suppose) a beautiful lady—although, as it happens, she is haughty and full of herself. Her delicate nose is rather elevated, one might say. Or is it the knight who makes her behave this way?

111 The knight is Pinabello. You recall him dropping Bradamante into a cave some months and cantos before? Those sobs and all those tears were for the girl to whom he gave

his heart, while Atlas, that inimical
sorcerer held her captive. But the brave
Bradamante had undone the magic power
that kept so many in his magic tower.

112 So there they are, the knight and his lady, who
are traveling—or gadding?—about from one
castle to the next as lovers do.
It’s a pleasant existence and they have had much fun,
eating and drinking well and dancing too
into the early hours until sun-
up. They could have continued this way but
the haughty lady could not keep her mouth shut.

113 It was a nasty and childish thing to do,
but women sometimes are like that. Anyway she
laughed at the crone and said that her looks were too
dreadful to be endured. Such calumny
Marfisa was not accustomed to hearing: “Who
is this to insult my companion—and also me?”
She replied to the girl that the old woman was more
attractive than she was—a hideous eyesore.

114 It isn’t just insults that they’re tossing back
and forth, for these are affronts to knightly honor,
and Marfisa proclaimed that she would now attack
and have the pretty gown that she had on her
and her palfrey too, to answer for her lack
of manners. Her remarks should be withdrawn or
the knight in whom she evidently placed
such confidence would be at once disgraced.

115 Pinabello cannot decline and he
turns his charger, grips his shield and lance,
and gallops in Marfisa’s direction, but she
aims at his visor so that, by his advance,

his head bangs into her weapon, which would be
painful indeed under any circumstance
but this—in which he falls and hits the dirt,
insensible, unconscious, and inert.

116 Marfisa orders the impudent girl to take
her clothes and jewelry off and hand them over
to the crone who can dress herself in them now and make
a better impression (except, as we discover,
she looks worse in that getup—a wedding cake
decked with spider webs festooned above her).
They take the palfrey too, so they can ride
each on her own horse and side by side.

117 More traveling, now, for three uneventful days,
but then on the fourth, they see another knight
galloping toward them all alone. In case
you're curious as to who he is, I'm quite
ready to volunteer. The handsome face
is that of Zerbino (Scotland's prince, all right?).
He's out for vengeance on the insubordinate
knight who'd struck Medoro when told to wait.

118 He'd followed the fellow through the woods like a dog
on the trail of some runaway, but there had been,
as can sometimes happen, a pea-soup fog
that made the pursuit more difficult. They were in
dense woods, with here and there a dangerous bog.
The lout got away, whose lapse in discipline
Zerbino had wanted to punish. But on the ride
the prince had felt his anger begin to subside.

119 He was, let us concede, in a rather strange
mood when he saw this woman, older than rocks,
all gussied up. Sometimes jokesters arrange
such finery on a monkey just for the yocks.

“Warrior,” he says, in an exchange
meant, I think, to be jocular but that mocks
the crone a little, “that maiden who appears
at your side is probably safe from other men’s leers.”

120 Her ancient eyes glittered with rage, for no
woman likes to be called plain (never mind
ugly). And in the instant she seemed to go
from bad to worse (though this may seem unkind).
As she frowned, her wrinkles further wrinkled so
that she looked like an old painting on which you find
crackelure, I think it is called. But we might
stipulate that she wasn’t a pretty sight.

121 The famous maiden pretended to be vexed
and for the fun of it responded to
Zerbino, saying, “Of all those of her sex,
she is more beautiful by far than you
are courteous. I can’t think what you may say next.
Are you totally blind? Or possibly the true
reason is your cowardice and, in fact,
your comment is intended to distract.

122 “What knight could come across such a fair maid
and not on the instant wish to make her his?”
“Ah, no,” Zerbino answered. “I’m not afraid,
but you and she belong together. It is
a perfect match. And she is so richly arrayed . . .
I would take an oath and swear to this—
that you are as courageous as she is fair
and that together you are a perfect pair.”

123 “If for some other reason you have a thought
of confronting me, I am ready to meet
you or anyone else—as any knight ought
to be. But not for her sake. If she be sweet

or sour, ugly or lovely, it means naught
to me, for she is yours. And I repeat
I have no intention of intruding
upon you. And we have no cause for feuding.”

124 “No more of this ridiculous rodomontade,”
Marfisa said. “I cannot endure it that you
should see such a hauntingly beautiful face as this maid
has and not want her for yourself. We two
must fight for her!” Said Zerbino, “This escapade
is crazy. The winner must lose, and the warrior who
wins the prize is the loser. Where is the credit
in any of this? I’m sorry, but I don’t get it.”

125 “Okay, okay,” Marfisa agreed. “We’ll trade.
The loser gets to keep her. And the winner
walks away. Your ardor for the maid
is minimal, it appears. Although her inner
beauty is great, as cannot be gainsaid,
on the outside she is rather a dog’s dinner.
If you lose to me you’ll take her where-
ever she wants to go. Does that sound fair?”

126 “Better,” Zerbino said and turned his horse
to get some space between them so he could charge.
He adjusted his stirrups and lance and then with force
struck Marfisa’s shield (it was like a targe
but bigger). She didn’t even move and, worse,
she hit his helmet’s visor with her large
lance and knocked him out of the saddle. He fell
to the ground and there he lay for quite a spell.

127 This had never happened to him before!
He had overthrown thousands, but none had
knocked him down from his horse. His back was sore
and worse than that his dignity felt bad.

It figures that there is always someone more strong and skillful than you are . . . But to add insult to injury, he thought with a groan how he'd be saddled now with that old crone.

- 128 “She’s yours,” Marfisa said, “to be her lover or companion, for she is lovely and I am sure that when you’ve had a chance to think things over, you will be glad that she is there under your protection. I trust I shall not discover that you are a faithless knight. But with a pure heart you will fulfill your vow and take her where she wants to go—for honor’s sake.”
- 129 Having said this, she forthwith canters away and disappears into the woods. Zerbino turns to the woman and asks if she can say who that knight was? And from where? She can see no reason to hide the truth from him (and she may enjoy the pain she knows it will cause him). “He? No knight at all, but a maiden who, in that pass, knocked you off your horse and onto your ass.
- 130 “Because of her great valor she comes here from the Orient to measure her famous powers against the best of France—and it is clear that she does very well against the flowers of knighthood. Wouldn’t you agree, my dear?” Zerbino blushed in shame. The errant now errs in guessing gender? He feels such a twinge that even his armor takes on a pinkish tinge.
- 131 He mounts his horse again and criticizes himself for not having kept his thighs tight. The crone cackles loudly and realizes that she can further annoy the hapless knight.

She reminds him of his oath and she apprises
him of his duties, as if he were not quite bright.
His ears droop as if he were some poor
horse, worn out, beaten, and saddle sore.

132 He gave a piteous sigh and expostulated
to Fortune: "How could this have happened to me?
The beautiful girl I loved and for whom I waited
is somewhere at the bottom of the sea,
and this is the substitute that I am fated
to have here at my side? It cannot be!
The loss was hard to bear but this is worse,
for you have replaced a blessing with a curse!

133 "The fish nibble those lovely lips and kiss
the eyes I eyed with such intense devotion,
but look at me now as I ride along with this
who ought to be in the deepest part of the ocean
or long ago should have nourished worms. It is
intolerable and absurd. There's no emotion
adequate to react to Fortune's taunt,
this total and catastrophic bouleversement."

134 Thus Zerbino spoke, and the aged crone
although she had never set eyes on him before
somehow understood that he was none
other than the man of whom the poor
Isabella had told her with many a moan
and sigh a while back in that cave. (And your
recollection, too, I think may need
some help, unless you remember all that you read.)

135 She was in that cave when the maiden told
her story to Orlando, and how at sea
her ship was wrecked but, swimming in the cold
waters of Rochelle, she was saved. And we

can suppose that it didn't take a very bold imagination to think that this could be the girl of whose loss the sad Zerbino now voiced complaint. And at this the wicked crone rejoiced.

136 "Listen, young man," she said to Zerbino, "you scorn me and my looks. You're very rude, you know. But of that young girl for whom you deeply mourn I have news. Still, if you treat me so, I shall not tell you. Stay as you are, forlorn and ignorant as you deserve. You are a low and vulgar fellow, behaving to me this way. I wouldn't even give you the time of day."

137 But that's not the funny part. It's only the first move in a game she's playing, which is cruel as you will see, for she has the very worst trick that she's figured out by which to fool and even corrupt him. She heard how he cursed his fate to have her with him. Remaining cool, she initiates the conversation thus, to torment him and, I trust, to amuse us.

138 She knows that he thinks his lady love has drowned. She also knows that this is not true, but what fun to give him grief and a run-around. "Tear me into pieces," she says. "I'll not say a word. Silence, I've sometimes found, is golden—when there's someone like you who's hot and bothered and wants to learn what you have to say if only you happened to be inclined that way."

139 Figure a growling dog that rushed to bite a burglar or thief. It suddenly grows quiet if he gives it something quite delicious—a piece of cheese perhaps. Its nose

twitches and it gives in to its appetite.
So Zerbino at once is tamed. His pose
is humble, beseeching, even prayerful (and she
does her best to conceal her inner glee).

140 He begs in the name of merciful heaven. “Forgive
me, if you can. I know I was wrong, but this
was just in fun. I promise, as I live,
never to speak or even think amiss.
I must know what you can say that’s indicative
of how and where she is!” And hearing this,
the crone played the card she’d kept back until now,
and it was an ace, I think you will allow.

141 “She is, indeed, alive,” the crone replied,
“but that won’t do you any good at all.
Or her either. You’ll wish that she had died,
as she does, too, I’m sure. It will appall
you to hear what happened to her. I tried
to keep it from you and to maintain a wall
of decent silence. But such is your insistence
that I cannot continue with further resistance.

142 “Since you last saw her,” the beldam said, “she has
been in the hands of twenty men or more,
so even if, somehow, you get the lass
back, she won’t be what she was before.
That little bud of hers you often pass
your time dreaming about—it isn’t for
you, I’m afraid. It has blossomed and opened wide
and . . . What you do is something for you to decide.”

143 She lies, of course, as I hardly need point out.
She has, indeed, been in the hands of many
men, but let me assure all those who doubt
her honor that she has not yielded to any.

Still Zerbino inquires—whereabout
did she last encounter Isabella. And when he
gets no answer, he says that he will cut
her scrawny throat if she keeps her vile mouth shut.

- 144 But because of his promise to Marfisa he can't
hurt her. There is nothing he can do
but go on with this hateful termagant
up hills and down as she directs. And you
can imagine what it must have been like. I shan't
dwell on it longer, for they meet someone. Who?
Another knight on the road. (This happens a lot.
In the next canto we'll follow along with the plot.)

Canto Ventesimoprimo

- 1 No piece of twine around a package or
nail driven into a board or metal hasp
has any greater firmness or any more
fixity than that of Faith's firm clasp
upon a righteous soul. In the emblem for
Faith among the ancients (and their grasp
of these things was quite good), they dress her in
pure white, immaculate of any sin.
- 2 They knew how even the slightest spot could taint
and a single sin as well as a thousand would
undo the delicate fabric. Not even a saint
can be secure. For simple folk in the wood
a promise holds a man with as much constraint
as any notarized contract. One's word is good.
Now we need things witnessed and countersigned
as if we thought the eye of heaven were blind.

- 3 Zerbino kept his promises as if
they were solemn oaths, which to him they were.
And the two went on together, silent and stiff,
although it made him sick to look at her.
He kept his eyes averted but a whiff
of the fumes of hell still made his stomach stir.
In his mind his given word fought with his wish
to be rid of her and the smell of rotten fish.
- 4 Grief, disgust, a touch of self-pity, and some
anger too, but none of these could make
him reconsider his promise. It was dumb
but he'd agreed, and now he'd have to take
the consequences. But this is where we come
to that knight they encounter. It was for the sake
of his entrance onto the scene here that we took
a little intermission in our book.
- 5 The crone recognizes the shield he carries, black
with a crimson band across. It's the proud device
of Hermonide of Holland. Taken aback,
she is no longer haughty now but nice
as she tells Zerbino that she fears an attack
from this man who is an enemy. The concise
reason is that he killed her father and
her only brother—and has more murders planned.
- 6 She is in all honesty (rare for her)
terrified and she tells Zerbino how
the knight has malign intentions, and they can infer
that he means ill for Zerbino as well. But now
he reassures her about what will occur.
She's under his protection. He will not allow
anything bad to happen to her while
they are together. He flashes a pained smile.

- 7 The other knight approaches and looks with rage
at Zerbino. He shouts a defiant challenge—to fight
or “yield that hideous creature of great age
so that I may kill her on the spot as she quite
justly deserves. If the two of us engage
in battle, you will die, for right is might—
and to be in the wrong is always a weakness. You
may not think so, but I believe it is true.”
- 8 Zerbino answers in as mild a way as he
can manage that to shed a woman’s blood
is hardly chivalric. “But if you would fight with me
for that or any other reason . . . Good,
I’m ready and willing. Still, I think you’ll agree
that at least as a general rule noblemen should
not stain their hands with women’s blood. There’s no
challenge to it. Do you not think so?”
- 9 But sometimes words, however well spoken, fail
and there’s nothing left but action to which to resort.
The two of them in armor and chain mail
go at each other, and I must report
that it was impressive enough to make one quail
at the power of each as the distance between them grew short
and they closed with a loud crash that the great speed
produced from the thundering hoofbeats of each steed.
- 10 Hermonide aims low to try to pierce
Zerbino’s side. It is a good maneuver
but the shaft of his lance shatters at the fierce
shock of the blow and he cannot recover.
The Scotsman’s result is better. His lance in tierce
goes all the way through Hermonide’s shield and, moreover,
Hermonide’s shoulder also—whereupon he
lies on the ground in insensibility.

- 11 Zerbino thought he'd killed him but he went
to see if he was still alive. He took
the helmet off. The other, still somnolent,
opened his eyes and focused them to look
up at Zerbino's face. Their argument
was settled now, but the wounded fellow shook
his head and said, "I do not at all regret
defeat at the hand of the best I've ever met,
- 12 "but it troubles me that we should have fought over that
treacherous woman. I cannot understand
how you can be her champion. She is not
worthy of you. When you have heard first hand
why I want to revenge myself and what
she did, you will come to grieve for my sake and
to hate her just as much as I do for
conduct that any gentleman would deplore.
- 13 "If I have sufficient breath remaining, as I
begin to doubt, I shall tell you how bad,
how amazingly wicked she is. Some years ago my
brother left Holland to visit Greece. The lad
applied to the emperor, Eraclio, to try
to become a knight. At the court there he had
a friend he'd made who, near the Serbian border,
lived in a strong-walled castle of the first order.
- 14 "That man was named Argeo and he was
the husband of that evil crone with whom
you ride. He was in love with her because . . .
But is there ever a reason? One must assume
that she was attractive once (although one's jaws
gape at the notion) when they were bride and groom.
He was a faithful and steady husband but she
was as flighty as leaves on the quaking aspen tree.

- 15 “For her my brother’s presence was like a wind that just came up. It was all that she required to go into a turmoil. Whether she’d sinned before, I have no idea, but she was fired now by his voice and manners, and how he grinned when someone said something funny. She admired him and wanted to take him for her own. It’s a kind of conduct that isn’t, alas, unknown.
- 16 “But the sea beats against the cliffs on the coast of Epirus with less effect, or the north winds blow on a deep-rooted Alpine pine and at the most shake its boughs . . . My brother stood firm so against the prayers of the wife of his friend and host. It must have been quite awkward for him, but I know that she was unbelievably indiscreet and from each of her crude advances, he’d retreat.
- 17 “As it happened, my brother, who would go out to seek adventures as young knights often do (and also to get away from the palace, no doubt), received a wound in combat. This happens, too. And he lay in bed to recover, which took about a week, I think. It was then that some business drew Argeo from the palace—he’d been called upon to do a service for someone. Anyway, he was gone.
- 18 “It was what this shameless creature had all along been waiting for. She was more importunate than ever. The fact that it was clearly wrong didn’t stop her at all. My brother’s great problem was how to handle this headstrong but demented woman. He could not contemplate betraying his friend and so, for their friendship’s sake, he decided to go away and make a clean break.

- 19 “What else after all could he possibly do?
Give in to the woman’s unlawful desires? Or tell
her husband that she had tried to be untrue?
He believed Argeo, who loved his wife very well,
might dislike hearing such news from the person who
had received those overtures he’d had to repel.
An awkward situation, you will agree.
He thought the most prudent course would be to flee.
- 20 “Still weak from his wound, he nevertheless gets dressed,
straps on his armor, and quietly rides away
from the castle, the county, the country. He thinks it is best
by far all around, even if he and they
never meet again. But the loftiest
motives can be irrelevant when events play
out in unfortunate ways. When Argeo appears,
his wife pours false accusations into his ears.
- 21 “Her hair is disheveled, her face is swollen and red,
and when he asks her what is the matter she
does not answer in words but shakes her head,
feigning unspeakable grief, whereupon he
asks again, and in her mean-spirited
scheme for revenge on my brother, she tells him. We
who know that there’s wickedness in the world are not
at all astonished by her obvious plot.
- 22 “All smarmy and contrite she confesses her sin
while her lord was gone. She says she could hide it from
the world, but even so, her soul within
would know with what shame she’s waited for him to come
home. She must confess that she has not been
the wife he deserves—although her opprobrium
may be a little mitigated perhaps,
because it was brute force that caused her lapse.

- 23 “To put it bluntly, what she has figured out is to accuse my brother of forcible rape, and to preclude any iota of his doubt she begs her husband (and we all but gape in amazement) to kill her at once, so that her devout soul may be freed of its soiled rind. A jape, a jest, a dirty joke. Perhaps to his credit Argeo isn’t suspicious enough to get it.
- 24 “‘Hook, line, and sinker,’ they say. He believes. His companion destroyed her honor, and boo-hoo-hoo. And as further evidence by which she deceives she attributes my brother’s abrupt departure to fear, lest she tell her husband. And then she heaves a deep sigh. Argeo, who never knew what a liar she was, is full of hatred for my brother—who rejected that lying whore.
- 25 “Argeo knows the countryside very well and my brother, you will remember, is wounded so he cannot push himself too hard or ride hell-bent-for-leather—and he doesn’t know what we do, that Argeo is after him. In a short spell he catches up with him in some pleasant lea and there insists that the two of them must fight. He demands this combat which he claims by right.
- 26 “My brother tries to explain, to deny the wild accusation, but Argeo will not hear anyone call his wife—whom he thinks was defiled—a liar too. They fight, and it is clear that Argeo has the advantage. He is riled and in good health. The other one, my dear brother Philander (for that is his name), is still on the mend and he is feeling rather ill.

- 27 “The fight is brief and my brother, in the end,
is helpless on the ground. Argeo says,
‘I do not wish to kill a former friend
despite my rage and your dreadful crime that has
disgusted me. It is therefore my end
to make it clear to the all the world that I was
better than you in hatred as well as in
friendship. I do not forgive you for your sin,
- 28 “‘but I do not want your blood on my hands.’ Instead
he brings him back to the castle and there, in a tower,
confines Philander ‘forever’ as though he were dead.
Better than death? Or worse? We all have our
differing views. But he doesn’t live on bread
and water. Rather, he lives as though in a bower
of pleasure. He has whatever he wants except
freedom to leave that tower in which he is kept.
- 29 “A surprising turn of events and not what she
had had in mind with her trumped up accusation,
but here was a new occasion for sin, as we
hear about in sermons. Her determination
revived, now that he was under lock and key—
and she had a key, of course. The situation
is something a writer of far-fetched tales would adore:
the upright young man beset by the cunning whore.
- 30 “She is utterly shameless and argues that
fidelity and honor have got him here,
which, as they both know very well is not
fair, but that’s how it is. The lesson is clear,
that having been confined this way for what
he didn’t do, he might as well do it. A leer,
a wink, and a loud guffaw at his expense is
likely, she hopes, to bring him to his senses.

- 31 “And if that is not enough, she can always turn the screw a little (pardon the expression) and let the young man know that if he can learn to be less harsh, she will make the concession she assumes he wants: it is a way to earn his freedom. But even this makes no impression upon the upright youth. She finds it odd that he is only concerned with the truth and God.
- 32 “He tells her this, and she is displeased to hear it. He doesn’t mind being shut up. It gives him time for meditation, and his spirit is better for the solitude. He lives in an endless round of prayer. If it’s austere, it is what he wants—the life of contemplatives that he has begun to learn how to enjoy. Her frequent appearances irritate and annoy.
- 33 “He has the idea that when they have both passed on, Argeo will learn the truth at last in heaven, and all their earthly bitterness will be gone or what little remains will be forgiven. This is for her all pious nonsense upon which she looks with contempt. She is still driven and she forms plan after plan, one after another, one of which, she thinks, will give her my brother.
- 34 “She visits every day but gets nowhere and then she begins to see that the opposite could perhaps be more efficient. And to prepare him for another assault it probably would be clever to stay away and let him dare imagine that she’s indifferent and that her blood has somehow cooled. He thinks that this is nice, but she has plumbed the depths of a darker vice.

- 35 “She stays away for six months which is a while,
and he thinks that there is nothing left to disturb
his contemplation and prayers. The woman’s guile
is way beyond him. Relentless and acerb,
she has figured out a maneuver with some style
by which to rid herself of this superb
but uncooperative and reluctant lover,
the details of which I am about to uncover.
- 36 “Argeo had an enemy, Morando
the Handsome, who, whenever Argeo was not
at home, would visit (making love *sforzando*
and running off). Argeo, however, had got
wind of this, and announced that he had planned—oh,
years ago—to go on the pilgrimage that
would take him off to Jerusalem, and he
let everyone know this. *He* had a plan, you see.
- 37 “With a great public show he sets out, but then
after dark, in secret, he returns,
unseen by anyone. Even the serving men
think he’s away and nobody ever learns
that it’s all a ruse—except his wife, whom again
and again he has sworn to silence. But she discerns
a way to convert the exercise to one
in which she can get a number of mean things done.
- 38 “Argeo lurks around the castle concealed
or in disguise and keeps his eyes peeled for
Morando appearing from some copse or field.
At night he goes back in through a postern door
and patiently waits for their crimes to be revealed.
And how do you suppose this shameless whore
reacts? Arrogant and with the impunity
of shamelessness, she seizes the opportunity.

- 39 “Again she goes to my brother, this time with a wild story she has made up. With tears and sighs, she tells him she is in danger of being defiled by Morando and begs for his help. Her shifty eyes are downcast as if in shame. He is beguiled and doesn’t suspect a thing. The enterprise she has in mind? He’ll help her remain true and preserve her honor and that of Argeo, too.
- 40 “She gives details for verisimilitude— how Morando has bribed the servants whom she cannot trust. Forget about her lewd conduct when she had come into his room. She was Mistress Goodwife now, and you’d find it hard to believe that she could assume this piety and virtue like a cloak, or that it wasn’t part of a wicked joke.
- 41 “‘If only my husband were here,’ she then explains, ‘he would not come any closer than three miles of the castle walls. But Argeo remains off on his pilgrimage, and Morando’s wiles are now unchecked by fear. I racked my brains and I thought of you . . .’ (She pauses now and smiles demurely. She had practiced this before a looking glass for half an hour or more.)
- 42 “What she tells my brother is that she has agreed to an assignation that very night. It was better than being taken by force and was extorted from her—so she thinks it’s all right for her to go back on the deal. See what she does? With an air of scrupulousness that would delight the most demanding moralist she claims the high ground—but it’s just one of her games.

- 43 “My brother, you remember, has been alone
in a tower for some months, and is half mad
with all that prayer and contemplation. One
whose life was not, in the first place, at all bad
can spend too much time in his attempts to atone.
But for whatever reason, she knew she had
him at hello. And she was right, you see.
To whatever she asked, she was sure he would agree.
- 44 “Still, she ratchets it up and has the nerve
to allude to her old behavior, saying, ‘If you
were not being cruel but only wanted to serve
your friend and his honor, then you will surely do
this thing for me and help me to preserve
that same honor. The stakes are higher, too,
for you and I would have sinned in private but he
would publish my disgrace for the world to see.’
- 45 “My brother tells her there is no need for all
these arguments. He’s willing, for his friend,
to do whatever he can, be it large or small.
‘Unjustly confined, I do not reprehend
him for this error. I’m grateful that you call
upon me even now to help defend
his honor and yours. Because you are his wife,
I’m ready, even if I risk my life.’
- 46 “So she explains the thing she wants is that
he kill Morando. She has worked out a plan.
He’s supposed to make an appearance at
the third hour, the dead of night. The man
will wait for her signal and, like a silent cat,
creep into her chamber—my brother can
be hidden, waiting all this while in some
convenient corner, motionless and mum.

- 47 “‘I will have him take off his armor,’ she says,
‘and he’ll be all but naked, ready for you
to strike the fatal blow.’ A dramatic phrase!
But remember, it will be her husband who
will be there! The very idea of it dismays
any sensible person. What a thing to do!
My brother was foolish perhaps, but not even sages
would suspect that a friend’s wife would be so outrageous.
- 48 “That night she leads him, armed, up to the room
and she secretes him somewhere until at last
Argeo appears. Philander, in the gloom,
cannot recognize him. And it is fast . . .
He strikes the man he’d reason to presume
was Morando. The sharp blade of his sword passed
downward to split the skull and the neck too.
He wasn’t wearing a helmet to bed. Would you?
- 49 “Now you understand what a monstrous scheme
it was, for my brother killed the man whom he
had tried to help. As if in some awful dream,
he’d done to his friend a thing that would surely be
the worst one could do to a foe. It was a supreme
irony, but that’s what she’d hoped for, you see.
Depraved, demented, cruel . . . I cannot give
any sufficiently terrible adjective.
- 50 “Argeo falls to the floor and my brother hands
Gabrina the sword. That is the witch’s name.
She takes it from him, and then in a whisper commands
that he bring a lamp. The best part of the game
is seeing him see whom he’s killed. He understands
at once that he’s been duped and is filled with shame.
Now she insists that he should yield to her—
or she will tell the world he’s a murderer.

- 51 “This time the accusation would be true,
although that surely was not what he’d had
in mind. But such distinctions cannot undo
the guilt that would attach to a truly bad
action. His honor, either way, he knew
was gone. He was filled with sorrow, and the lad
considered killing Gabrina then and there
as a way of expressing his rage and deep despair.
- 52 “She had the sword, you will have noted, but he
was so enraged that he would have attacked
with his teeth like a mad dog, for she ought to be
mauled to death, he thought. But such an act
would be fatal for him as well, for he could see
that he was in her house, an awkward fact
that meant he would die himself and probably soon—
if not this morning, then surely by afternoon.
- 53 “There can be times at sea when a ship is tossed
by two different winds, one of which propels
it forward while the other one is crossed
or retrograde, and among the powerful swells
it turns and yaws as if the crew were lost
and the ship were one of those ghostly caravels
that wanders about at random until at last
the stronger wind prevails—or the storm has passed.
- 54 “This is how it was with my brother there,
fearing death and, even more, disgrace.
Which was the lesser evil then? Did he dare
let his emotions take over in reason’s place?
He had to decide in an instant and, to be fair,
that isn’t the best way to consider a case.
He saw that he was trapped. He threw up his hands
and gave way at last to Gabrina’s sordid demands.

- 55 “His only condition was that they go away
from the castle and its unpleasant associations.
She agreed to that. She didn’t much want to stay
longer herself. Having shown cunning and patience,
she wasn’t inclined to forgo the prize. So, okay.
They departed from Greece and all of its vexations
and returned to us. He was burdened with grief and shame
at the dishonor he’d brought on himself and on our name.
- 56 “What kind of world is it in which you can kill
and get as your prize a Procne or a Medea?
It was only by a constant act of will
that he remembered his oath—that he would be a
true and faithful servant to her—that still
stayed his hand from carrying out the idea
of wringing her neck, which would have been a great
satisfaction for such was his venomous hate.
- 57 “He never smiled. His words were always sad
as if he were some mythic figure—take
Orestes, for example, driven half mad
when he killed his mother and that dreadful rake
Aigisthos, whereupon the Furies had
him at their mercy. We feared his heart would break.
He slept very little, although he stayed in bed
most of the time. He wasn’t right in the head.
- 58 “And Gabrina? She’s wicked but not stupid, and she
notices—how could she fail to do so?—his mood.
She takes it as an insult, which would be
not at all incorrect, I think. Her lewd
passion for him now curdles to enmity,
which, in her, is a dangerous attitude.
She decides to get rid of Philander as she has done
successfully with husband number one.

- 59 “She finds a crooked doctor whose reputation
is better for making patients sick than healing.
The compounds, tinctures, and syrups of his creation
can stop the heart or set the blood to congealing.
To him she makes a fervent application
offering him more than he asks—which is appealing.
She wants a concoction that will dispatch her groom
at once onto his slab in the family tomb.
- 60 “With deadly poison (what other kind is there?)
in his hand the doctor comes to visit my brother.
He is in bed and the offer of medical care
seems reasonable but, with one thing and another,
he’s now a bit suspicious. His questioning stare
prompts her to think how blackmail is a bother
against which she can protect herself in a hurry,
so that in future she won’t have to worry.
- 61 “What she says to the doctor is that she is afraid
that there might be some mistake in the potion and he
should take at least a sip of what he has made
to demonstrate to Philander that it is free
of noxious substances. He is betrayed,
but what can he do? Confess? Then he will be
killed on the instant. What is to be done?
Take the poison? Or maybe try to run?
- 62 “With much dismay he takes a little sip.
This reassures Philander, and he thinks
it must be all right. He brings the cup to his lip
and, confident in what he’s just seen, he drinks
the whole thing down, and wipes a tiny drip
from his chin. It’s nasty and it really stinks,
but it’s medicine, right? And clearly he requires
something to rekindle his vital fires.

- 63 “How would you like a fable? A sparrow hawk
has in its talons a starling it’s going to eat,
but just before it does so, it gets a shock
from the good old hound that pounces on it. To meet
such come-uppance with no delay or talk
and a triumph turned to unexpected defeat
happens sometimes. So much for the wicked plan
of the doctor—an unethical, greedy man.
- 64 “What he wants now is to run home and throw up
or take some antidote. But Gabrina will not
permit him to leave. Whatever was in the cup
must show its effect before he goes. Oh, what
can he possibly do? He is about to dup
the door and flee. He is most distraught,
for Gabrina is unyielding and steadfast
and he has no clear idea how long he’ll last.
- 65 “He begs, he offers her money. The desperate man
understands that her wish is to be rid
of him as well as her husband, and he can
understand that he will die, for he did
drink enough of that toxin that now ran
through his veins and organs. He could bid
good-bye to the light and the world that he had served
so badly, getting the punishment he deserved.
- 66 “But now he had nothing to lose and with his last word
he told us what he and Gabrina had done,
killing Philander. It never even occurred
to him that she’d kill him as well, but to murder one
opens the door for more. ‘It’s wholly absurd
to be dispatched this way and by my own
decoction. But you know dying men don’t lie,
and the villain in this business is she, not I.’

- 67 “Hearing the truth at last, we locked her away
in a dungeon (as one would cage some feral beast,
for she was more cruel and dangerous than they)
until we could burn her to death, which was the least
punishment she deserved.” He was ready to say
more, but Hermonide’s voice had much decreased
as the pain of his wound distressed him. He was weak
from the loss of blood and could no longer speak.
- 68 His squires cut branches to make a litter to bear
him away, and Zerbino apologized because
he regretted the wound and their combat—although there
was necessity under chivalry’s strict laws
that he defend the woman in his care,
no matter how deplorable she was.
“I’m deeply sorry,” he said, “and if I can do
anything to help, I’d be happy to.”
- 69 The knight’s answer was brief but pointed. He
only wished that Zerbino try to get rid
of that terrible woman with him. Otherwise she
would do to him something like what she did
to everyone else, when the opportunity
arose. During this speech, Gabrina hid
her eyes and stared down at the ground, as you
might expect, for every word was true.
- 70 So Zerbino trots off with Gabrina at his side
as he has solemnly promised. But he knows
who and what she is now, and their ride
is terribly unpleasant we must suppose.
The knight, he thought, had been quite justified
in his hatred for this horror and all the woes
she had brought him. If Zerbino before
hated her, now he did so even more.

- 71 And for her part, Gabrina, who was not
a generous person, returned the hatred doubled
and redoubled. (Anyway, a lot.)
She knew how he despised her and she was troubled
so that her hard heart was filled with hot
venom that in her bloodstream boiled and bubbled.
This was the spirit of the continuation
of their travels—a silent mutual detestation.
- 72 They go on that way for hours but late that day
with the sun low in the west the two of them hear
shouts and ringing metal. It's not far away.
Zerbino goes forward to try to get a clear
view of what's going on. And I will say
more about it very soon, but I fear
that your ears have grown as weary as my throat.
In the next canto, I'll tell you the anecdote.

Canto Ventesimosecondo

- 1 You ladies, pleasant, courteous, and constant,
with but a single lover, let me say
that nothing I've written about Gabrina was meant
to apply to any of you in any way,
for few of you are like her. (One percent?)
I shouldn't like to displease you but, if I may,
I am obliged to resume my excoriation
of her as I return to our narration.
- 2 Her spirit was perverted. The muse who inspires
my verses sets a standard I must observe.
Honesty and truth are what she requires
of us who have the high honor to serve

her. And you know the entire world admires
John or Peter, who do not deserve
our hatred for Judas. Their fame did not decrease as
he sold our Lord for thirty silver pieces.

- 3 If I must condemn Gabrina, I would praise
a hundred women to compensate for this
and sing their virtues, brighter than the rays
of the morning sun. But our story's fabric is
made of strands combining in different ways.
We were with the knight of Scotland and his
reaction as he heard the sounds of a fight
that he was scouting out. (I think that's right.)
- 4 Between two mountains, there was a narrow pass
along which he was proceeding when on the ground
he saw a knight who'd been killed. And who he was
I shall disclose eventually. But I'm bound
to turn my back on France for a while (alas!)
and look to the Levant where the loud sound
of Astolfo's horn had just been heard, and he
had left that city of women and now was free.
- 5 His companions, you will remember had sailed away
filled with shame at their reaction to
that blast that had occasioned their display
of almost abject terror. They and the crew
were on the ship and moving out of the bay,
leaving Astolfo ashore alone to do
whatever he can to get away. He restrains
a sigh, points his horse northward, and flicks the reins.
- 6 Armenia first, Anatolia, and on
to Bursa (it's Bythnia's capital city, no?),
then Thrace and up the Danube where, anon,
he passes through Buda and Pest, after which he would go

to Moravia and Bohemia. When he is gone
from there he gets to Franconia and so
forth up the River Rhine. And then? And then
he is passing through the forest of Ardennes,

- 7 Aix la Chapelle, and Brabant, until he reaches
Flanders where he boards a ship and when
the breeze is right they set sail for the beaches
of England, which is home. There the men
help him and his horse disembark (and each is
happy to be on terra firma again).
He's off at once and he goes all the way
to London, which he reaches that same day.
- 8 But Otto (the king, remember?) is not there.
He went to Paris many months ago
with most of his barons following him to share
in the battle and the glory. What do you know!
Astolfo goes to the port on the Thames where
he finds a ship that doesn't look too slow
and, as the captain says, is on the way
across the channel. He's bound for Calais.
- 9 They sail down to the mouth of the Thames and head
for France, but the winds have different ideas. They grow
stronger by the hour. What the captain said
seems not to have registered. They blow
in another direction. The steersman, who is led
by a desire to live, turns the vessel so
that the wind is on the poop. You will please note
that this is a way in a storm to keep afloat.
- 10 To port, to starboard, whatever. He goes on
hoping to put ashore somewhere (it doesn't
matter much). They wind up in Rouen,
which you will remember really wasn't

what Astolfo's mind had been set upon.
To be ashore however is very pleasant.
He saddles Rabican and mounts to ride
to Otto. His magic horn hangs at his side.

- 11 He was passing through a forest and the hour
was late, the time the sheep are put in a fold
or maybe a mountain cave somewhere, and our
Astolfo was feeling thirsty when—lo and behold!—
he saw a bubbling spring in a pretty bower
in which there was fresh water, clear and cold.
He tied his horse to a nearby tree so he
could drink from the spring that bubbled pleasingly.
- 12 He had not yet touched his lips to the water when
some farmer lad in a thicket bounded out,
jumped on the horse, and ran off with him. And then
Astolfo, hearing the hoofbeats, looked about
and of course gave chase. It's said there are some men
who can outrun a horse, but he had doubt
that he could catch Rabican although he tried
as well as he could, if only out of pride.
- 13 Oddly, the thief is not in a hurry but trots
slowly along, for otherwise the knight
would disappear behind him. In some spots
he canters a bit, but then with the reins held tight
slows down again. He repeats this maneuver lots
of times, so he remains always in sight
of Astolfo. After a while they come to a clear
place—there are many barons held captive here.
- 14 There's a palace, and the farmer rides the horse
inside and disappears. Astolfo pursues
as fast as he can, but he is in armor, of course,
which rather slows him down. (He did not choose

the conditions of the race, which couldn't be worse.)
He follows into the palace, wondering whose
it is, and he runs through galleries and halls
making a good deal of noise with his footfalls.

- 15 He rushes this way and that. You'd think it would
be difficult to hide a horse, but there
is not a trace of Rabican, that good,
that truly matchless horse, beyond compare.
Porches, corridors, even bedrooms that could
conceal a sizeable animal or where
he might have wandered, Astolfo searches through,
but there isn't a trace of him. What then to do?
- 16 He sees that he's been in this room before and he
begins to understand that the palace might
somehow be enchanted. But fortunately
he remembers the book that Logistilla one night
in India had given him. There, you see,
were charms and magic spells an errant knight
might need to know about from wicked mages.
Its index sent him at once to the proper pages.
- 17 Let's see, let's see. Enchanted palaces, yes!
It says what to do when you find one and how to break
the bonds of those confined here and, no less
than you, want to escape, make no mistake.
Under the threshold, a spirit you must dispossess
controls these deceptions and tricks. In order to make
him powerless you must raise that stone. At a stroke
the palace and all you see will go up in smoke.
- 18 Good! He goes to the threshold and he tries
to lift the marble stone as the book said
to do. It's heavy and difficult to prize
up, but never mind. He goes ahead.

But Atlas is observing and with keen eyes
sees what Astolfo is doing, so instead
of just giving up, he uses a new spell
which he hopes will serve his purposes well.

- 19 Abracadabra, or whatever it is, but the spell
changes Astolfo's appearance so that he seems
different to different people who can't tell
him from one of the monsters of their dreams.
One sees a giant, another a creature from hell
dressed up as a knight. It's a reprise of old themes,
for whatever Atlas appeared as to them when they first
met, Astolfo resembles. And he is accursed!
- 20 They set upon him at once, Ruggiero, Gradasso,
Iroldo, Bradamante, and Brandimart,
their shrieks a chorus from mezzo soprano to basso
as they set upon him intending to tear him apart.
It isn't pretty. Astolfo is glad that he has so
useful a mode of defense as his horn. Apart
from that, his chances would not have been good. But he blew
a mighty blast that scattered the angry crew.
- 21 Atlas fled with his captives and from the stable
the horses broke loose from their tethers and ran away
as rapidly as any horses are able
to do. Nor did the mice or pussycats stay
but took off for safety. The knight had turned the table
on the wicked magician in an effective way.
It seemed as though somebody had fired a shot
that had scattered a flock of pigeons from the spot.
- 22 I am relieved to report that Rabican
on his way to hell-and-gone happened to pass
by where Astolfo stood. And this was the man
who'd ridden him and brushed him and who was

his beloved master, the giver of oats and bran.
He stopped of course and stood still on the grass.
His fears from those loud noises now were gone
and he waited for when Astolfo would want to get on.

- 23 But first he had to lift that threshold to see
whether what it said in the book was true.
He did so, and he discovered . . . But pardon me.
I should not confide these things, not even to you.
Images, say. And what he had to do
was to smash them into pieces. The palace to
which he'd been drawn instantly disappeared
in a puff of smoke and mist. It was truly weird.
- 24 He turned around and saw another beast,
this one tied with a golden chain. Ruggiero's
hippogryph, if you please. You do at least
recall that Atlas had given him to the hero
to take to Alcina. Logistilla had pieced
a bridle together without which he'd have had zero
chance to ride the animal. But he'd gone
around the world on the creature. (It was fun.)
- 25 It was when Ruggiero was busy on the chase
after Angelica (Galafron's daughter), who, nude,
suddenly vanished, which made him red in the face,
that the beast flew off to its master where it stood
until the palace enchantment was broken. (No trace
of any of this remains? You remember? Good!)
At any rate, here it is, and a splendid find.
But how can he just leave Rabican behind?
- 26 On the other hand, if you want to circle the whole
globe, this is the animal you'd want.
To explore the land and the seas! It fills the soul
with exhilaration. And, frankly, Rabican can't

fly, which mostly isn't a horse's role.
Astolfo remembers how he once took a jaunt
on the wonderful beast with Melissa's help. It had been a
treat after having been a bush for Alcina.

- 27 He'd watched Logistilla teach Ruggiero how
to control the animal, running and flying, and what
to do to get him to stop, and he felt now
that he could probably manage all of that.
But basically what he is thinking there is, "Wow!
What an opportunity! How can I not?"
In the stables he finds a saddle and using the arts
of the currier he contrives from various parts
- 28 of the bridles hanging there a suitable one.
He goes back to the hippogryph and it all
fits quite well. Soon this work is done,
and he's ready to ride, or fly, but there's still the small
problem of Rabican, which he had begun
to think about a while back, you'll recall,
indeed, from the first time that he had laid eyes
on this absolutely irresistible prize.
- 29 A wonderful horse, but a horse is a horse and it's not
a hippogryph. Still, in a joust or fight
his courage and strength could never be forgot.
Just to leave him there would not be right.
To a friend who appreciated and knew a lot
about good horses, he could make a quite
splendid gift and ensure that the horse would find
an owner who'd treat him well and would be kind.
- 30 Astolfo stands there waiting for some passer-by,
a hunter or maybe a farmer who could follow to
a nearby city in which he could at least try
to find a new owner. A sensible thing to do,

but nobody comes. It's night, and then the sky begins to turn bright in the east when, view-halloo, he sees a knight who's approaching through the wood, which is interesting and maybe even good.

31 But wait. Let's hold our hippogryphs and horses for a little while, and turn our attention here to Bradamante and Ruggiero whose courses have taken them far from the palace. They appear now recognizable to each other. The forces of Atlas' spells having stopped, their eyes are clear. When you recognize someone you didn't notice at first the shock and the awkwardness are at their worst.

32 That momentary embarrassment gives way to joy when the effects of the magic are gone and, in the lovely light of day, they can behold each other, which is far more important. Ruggiero (hooray!) embraces his lady after this singular adventure, and she blushes like a rose as he kisses her mouth, her eyelids, and her nose.

33 They can scarcely contain their happiness. It seems funny, now, that the two of them, so close, failed to recognize each other. In dreams such dreadful things may happen, I suppose, but they are awake and together now. He beams and she does too. Their happiness only grows now that they have escaped from that house of mistakes. They are happy and grateful for each other's sakes.

34 Did it cross Bradamante's mind that maybe she should give him that last token of woman's love? No! Wise virgins know that that's not good without the blessing and sanctification of

their union. Her love for him is understood, but he must ask Amon, her father, if he can have her hand (and all the rest). He also must be baptized as a Christian. Does he agree?

35 Ruggiero makes no objection. His father was a Christian, after all, and his grandfather too. He smiles at her and tells her that he has no problem, whatever it is that she wants him to do. Water on his head? Even if it was the fire of hot coals he would go through the ceremony, for that long awaited moment when their love will be consummated.

36 So off they go to the abbey at Vallombrosa (founded in 1036), a splendid and rich place to be baptized, and, I suppose, a not too distant establishment to which they hastened. But on the way (the reader knows a divagation is likely now, some switch in the narrative's direction) they meet a sad and tearful woman. What were the troubles she had?

37 Ruggerio, as we know, is a kindly sort, attentive to the plight of women who are in distress. Her difficulties distort her lovely features, and large tears bestrew her face. Ruggerio's greeting to her is short but courteous and he asks what he can do to help her. Why is she weeping so? What woe besets her? Ruggiero wants to know.

38 She's grateful for his concern but she has small hope that he can do much to relieve her troubles, which she is convinced are all but irremediable. But she says, "I grieve

because of the pity I feel for a tragical
conclusion to a love story. I believe
a handsome but quite miserable lad
will be burnt alive today. It's very sad.

- 39 “This young man was in love with a comely lass,
the daughter of Marsilio, King of Spain
and, wearing a white gown and a veil, he could pass—
and did—as a serving woman so he could gain
admission to her bedchamber. (Talk about brass!)
They lay together there again and again.
But secrets can only be kept so long until they
shred at the edges and soon thereafter give way.
- 40 “One woman figured it out, and she told one
friend, who told another one or two,
and rumor (or even the truth) when it has begun
to spread runs like a wildfire all through
the palace, and everyone knows. Before it is done
reverberating, the king, who hasn't a clue
most of the time to what's going on, has heard
the chirping of the proverbial little bird.
- 41 “Guards come and find the lovers in flagrante.
They separate the two and lock them away
down in the dungeons. The time remaining is scanty
before they take the boy outside to say
his prayers and suffer the fate of a miscreant. He
will die at the stake, I think sometime today.
I fled because I could not suffer to see
anyone burning alive in such agony.
- 42 “What makes it even worse is how comely he is,
how smooth his limbs, how perfect his every feature . . .”
But she cannot go on. Bradamante hearing all this
is distressed not only for some fellow creature,

but more, as if, at the lip of this abyss,
her own brother teetered. (I entreat your
indulgence here—it's not just a metaphor.
In not very long I'll be able to tell you more.)

43 Bradamante tells Ruggiero that they must do
whatever they can to be of help to this
unfortunate youth and says to the sad one, "You
must help us get through the city gates. If it is
not too late when we arrive, we two
will see that they do not kill him." And for his
part, Ruggiero shares their heartfelt concern
that the fine young man should not suffer and burn.

44 He asks the woman, "What are we waiting for?
Standing here and weeping will do no good.
We should be off at once and hurry or
we may not get there in time. Even if there should
be a thousand lances and sharp swords or more,
we can overcome them—if you would
help us to get to the city. Otherwise,
the unfortunate youth you speak of probably dies."

45 A rousing speech, no? And it gives her a slight
moment of hope which instantly fades again.
She doesn't move. It is as if she's quite
paralyzed. She can't even speak to him when
he prompts her: "So? At least tell us the right
road to take. You can do that?" But then
her tears resume their pitiable flow
and she tells Ruggiero sadly, "I don't know.

46 "If we take the direct road we'll get there well
in time. But if we go by the back way, we
will be lucky to hear the toll of the vesper bell
and the youth will have been turned to ashes. He

is beyond all hope, and his death knell
I'm afraid is what the campanile will be
clanging into the air and pouring down."
It was then that her words gave way to a pained frown.

- 47 Ruggiero, mystified and slightly annoyed,
asks why they shouldn't take the direct route.
The woman answers that they would want to avoid
Pinabello's castle. "He's a perfect brute.
The son of Count Anselmo, he has employed
men and women of honor to harass and loot
any innocent travelers passing by—
but it's decency itself that he wants to defy.
- 48 "A knight must leave his arms there and, worse than that,
a lady must leave her clothing. This is his weird
rule. He has four knights who are living at
the castle and whose prowess is widely feared
who have sworn to uphold the rule, no matter what.
It is only three days now since they appeared,
but I'll tell you how it happened and let you decide
if they were right—and which way we should ride.
- 49 "Pinabello has with him the worst
woman in the world. I am not clear
on all the details, but what has been rehearsed
to me is that, not very far from here,
there was a knight who shamed her. She had first
mocked him for the woman on the rear
of his horse, and he, a most punctilious fellow,
had thereupon challenged and jousting with Pinabello.
- 50 "Pinabello's pride is greater than
his strength and skill, and he was at once knocked down.
The knight then made the lady strip to her tan
line, and he ordered her to parade around

starkers. The clothes that she had worn, the man gave to his companion to wear. (She found them nicer than what she'd had on before.) Then they took her palfrey and both of them rode away.

- 51 “What happened to that knight, nobody knows, but Pinabello’s lady demands a cruel revenge—which is the reason, I suppose, for this new and altogether preposterous rule. She will not be happy until a thousand of those who pass by are disarmed or stripped. And you’ll agree, I’m sure, that this is very wrong. But Pinabello, to please her, goes along.
- 52 “As it happened, on that same day there were four knights who arrived at the palace: Aquilant, Grifon, Sansonetto, and one more, a youth, Guidon Selvaggio. Our miscreant gave them a warm welcome at his door, food, drink, and comfy beds. One can’t blame them, but that night he seized them there in bed and he forced each of them to swear
- 53 “that for a year and a month they all would stay with him to plunder every wandering knight and strip all women of their clothes in the way his lady had been stripped. It wasn’t right but still they swore. Unfortunately they are men of honor and therefore they are quite bound by their oaths. What they are required to do distresses them and is absolutely *fou*.
- 54 “Up until now, no one who has dared to go against them has succeeded, but is left on the ground, humiliated and scared while the women try to hide their you-know-what.

Considering how these other knights have fared,
I think we ought not to travel by this 'short cut,'
but go to the city taking the longer way
which will surely get there later on today.

55 “They draw lots to see which one of them will fight,
but then, if the enemy's strong enough to withstand
the first pass, the rest of them, in spite
of chivalry's rules join in and as a band
assault the man and kill him. It's not right,
but nevertheless it's how they operate and
even if you have great skill and power
I doubt that you can beat them all in an hour.

56 “I don't think you'd lose, for your noble bearing is such
and your strength is clear to see, but it will take
time for you to do this, much too much,
and therefore, if only for the poor youth's sake,
we should avoid a battle with those in the clutch
of the wicked Pinabello. It would break
my heart to be delayed at that castle in
a bout even if eventually you win.”

57 Ruggiero tries to reassure her: “We
will do what we have to do. Let Him who rules
our destinies look down at us and see
how well we fare. Or if we're Fortune's fools,
let Fortune then decide what happens to me.
It will be like the games they play when school's
out, and you will see how well we'll fare
later when we approach the city square.”

58 They go off on the direct road and within
three miles approach the bridge and the looming gate
where armor and clothing are lost and people are in
danger of their lives. To anticipate

their coming, someone up where he has been
posted in a tower makes a great
clang on a bell, and then someone else will say
that a party of travelers has now come their way.

59 This is the cue for an old man to appear
on a pony to say the toll now must be paid—
the arms of the knights and the clothes of the women—which here
is the rule and custom, and it must be obeyed.
Also the horses of course. And with good cheer,
he explains the system that Pinabello has made,
and recommends that, if they want to live,
they should pay rather than try the alternative.

60 Oddly enough he's a nice old guy, and he says
that armor and clothing and horses one can get
anywhere and in any number of ways,
but life is precious and nobody has yet
figured out how to add to his measure of days.
These knights you'd face are the best you've ever met,
and they aren't worth your lives: some weapons, some rags,
and two or three perfectly good but replaceable nags.

61 Ruggiero answers, "Never mind all that.
I am fully informed and have come here to test
myself against Pinabello's apparatus.
I do not give in to extortion. All the rest
is negligible, but honor is really what
we're discussing here. These threats are a tasteless jest
but we shall have, I believe, the last laugh here.
Those inside are the ones who should feel fear.

62 "But the point is that we are rather pressed for time.
Let us see the faces of these men
so that we can deal with them in short order. I'm
unable to tarry longer here." Just then

the old man said, “Here he comes, your prime adversary.” And indeed a specimen of knightly style appeared, in a coat of bright red covered with woven flowers of white.

- 63 Bradamante thought he was pretty and she wanted to have the honor of knocking him off his high horse. But Ruggiero said he would do this chore which didn't seem too tough. She didn't argue about this but would be a spectator. She knew she would have enough opportunity later, here or in town, to display her talent for knocking strong men down.
- 64 Ruggiero asks the old man who this fop might be with the pretty coat. The answer is that it's Sansonetto—a bit over the top but formidable nonetheless. At this the bout begins, clippety-clippety-clop as the horses charge. Each knight positions his lance to knock the other one down at the first encounter when the distance has been traversed.
- 65 Along the sidelines many footmen and grooms were ready to receive the armor and clothes as soon as the visitors lose, and one assumes that this is their expectation. But how it goes is up to the two contenders. Each one looms larger and larger as they approach with those enormous lances, entire trunks of trees cut for the purpose of such hostilities.
- 66 These enormous pieces of timber require specially hardened breastplates and shields to withstand the force of their blows. Sansonetto's squire had provided a lance to Ruggiero and

Sansonetto had one as well. (We admire such scrupulousness. And that's how it was planned.) The tips of the lances were made of hardened iron that blacksmiths had used their very hottest fire on.

67 You'd think they were meant to pierce anvils, but there's no worry on Ruggiero's part. His shield was made by the naked demons down below in Atlas' workshop, tempered and annealed so that it could withstand even the strongest blow. And you will recall when it is revealed—that is, when its cloth cover is taken away—its dazzle stuns all those who see its display.

68 Most of the time, he keeps it covered. It's not altogether fair to use it unless he or the people with him have been caught in a situation of danger and duress. It is also supposed to be so finely wrought that nothing can penetrate it, but I should guess such occasions do not often arise. It's enough when enemies lose the use of their eyes.

69 Sansonetto's shield is *mezzo-mezz'*; which is to say it is really pretty good or as good as a non-magical implement gets, but a mighty blow like Ruggiero's it could not resist. It splits apart and lets the lance point penetrate and it draws blood. His arm wounded, Sansonetto slips from the saddle and then for a while in the stirrups' grips

70 drags on the ground. This has not happened before, but there is a plan in place. The man with the bell rings again, and from the palace more men appear to continue the fight as well

as they can—at these long odds, if you're keeping score.
Fortune's smiles are often able to jell
to an icy grin, and there was little doubt
about how this unfair contest would turn out.

71 Meanwhile on the sidelines, Pinabello
sidles up to Bradamante to ask
who on earth is this formidable fellow
who downed his knight. Bradamante's face is a mask
but she recognizes the horse he's riding. Hello!
It's hers. He took it from her. Not to task
your memory, eight months before she fell
down into Merlin's tomb, and it hurt like hell.

72 Pinabello was left alone and supposed
that she was dead. He left and took her horse.
You remember that? He thought the matter closed,
but the justice of God is certain in its course,
however slow. She remains composed
but from the steed she can infer, perforce,
that this must be the wicked count who tried
to kill her. And indeed she nearly died.

73 Well, how convenient! How satisfying it is
to be able now to repay him for his vile
behavior. She moves a bit so as to block his
path, and her hand is on her sword meanwhile.
He cannot hide in his castle, although this
is what foxes do in their instinctive guile.
With no other choice, he heads Bradamante's steed
into the forest, running at full speed.

74 But the underbrush is thick and how fast can he go?
She catches up and the angry maiden slashes
now and again with her sword and even though
she sometimes misses, she hits, too. There are gashes

in Pinabello's side. He's shrieking so,
but at the castle the intermittent crashes
of the joust are what they're all attending to
and no one hears Pinabello's hullabaloo.

75 Back at the castle the three remaining knights
come out, but they are loath to attack with three
against one opponent. The harlot with them indicts
them for breaking their oaths. You remember that she
was the one who set up the rules for all these fights.
But they are most reluctant and agree
that this would be dishonorable. They
would rather die than gang up on the man this way.

76 She's furious (which is not, I am afraid,
unusual) and reminds them that to refuse
would be to break the solemn oath that they'd made
and admit that they are liars. To her abuse
they answer that they do not try to evade
their duty, but that they'd much rather choose
single combat, one against one, which takes
more courage, does it not? (For heaven's sakes!)

77 Guidon Selvaggio puts it to her clearly:
"If I can beat him down with this one lance,
would that not be satisfactory or nearly?
All I am asking of you is the chance
to serve you but in a way that does not severely
compromise me. Under the circumstance
of my defeat, you may cut off my head,
which I shall be content to have forfeited."

78 So say the others, Grifon first and then
Aquilant, with dignity and fervor,
for all of them are honorable men.
In no way are any of them lacking in nerve or

courage, but the woman insists again
that they gave their word and promised they would serve her.
That's what they said they would do in this situation.
This isn't the time for a renegotiation.

79 “If you wanted to niggle and haggle, you should have done
this when we had you in prison. Now it's too late.
What we agreed to then is not for one
party to try to change or abrogate.
Otherwise I am forced to conclude that none
of you is honorable. You tergiversate
and are not knights but merely thugs.” And then
Ruggiero shouted his taunts at the three men.

80 “Here are those arms you wanted. Come and take
them. And here's the horse. Its saddle is new
and armor also. And there is the woman. Make
her get undressed if you think you can—one, two,
or all of you together. Or do you quake
in fear of me and my lance? If I were you
I'd hide my face in shame, or run away
and try to forget what happened here this day.”

81 Their faces red with shame, the three advanced,
the sons of the Marquis de Vienne slightly ahead,
and close behind them—the horse that he rode chanced
to be a little slower—the spirited
Guidon Selvaggio. Ruggiero's steed pranced
with all the energy of a thoroughbred.
His magic shield was covered: its deadly gleam
only for use in cases most extreme.

82 In fact he'd only used it . . . What is it? Three
times? I think that's right. When he escaped
from Alcina's lotus-land was twice. And he
used it again on the Orca whose jaws gaped

for beautiful maidens. Otherwise we see
that the veil was never removed but always taped
(or however it was affixed) for fairness' sake.
It was an advantage he didn't like to take.

83 This time it was covered, for he thought
these three were no more than little children who
were playing at knights in armor that was bought
by indulgent parents. Therefore, with little ado
when Ruggiero charged, his lance point sought
Grifon's shield—and hit it smartly, too.
Grifon teetered a bit and then was downed
but he still had his lance as he lay there on the ground.

84 He doesn't give up, but manages to strike
a glancing blow that slides across the rim
of Ruggiero's shield, harmless, oblique—
except that it rips the veil that has kept dim
the dazzling surface that in his sportsmanlike
way Ruggiero hadn't planned, and for him
it was unexpected, an absolute surprise.
One makes one's plans that the world will sometimes revise.

85 A fluttering piece of the veil hangs on but then
Aquilant comes abreast and his lance catches
the cloth and tears it away altogether. When
that happens the blazing light that more than matches
a lightning bolt shines out at all three men
and as it's supposed to do at once dispatches
all of them—they're not only blinded but
all their other senses too are shut.

86 They're stretched out on the ground like little dolls
a careless child has strewn on a nursery floor.
Ruggiero hasn't even noticed the falls
of all his opponents. He turns his horse for more

of this encounter, but there they are. It appalls
his sensibility but that's what the shield is for,
though he hadn't intended to put it into use.
(But is that, he asks, an adequate excuse?)

- 87 And the spectators? The women? The servants? They
too at this *coup de foudre* were undone.
Horses fell down and gasped in a pitiful way.
It affected everything and everyone.
It looked as though the plague had come that day
and slain them all, but that comparison
is not quite right. The plague takes time, you see,
and a few are spared from its catastrophe.
- 88 What could have happened? He looks at the shield and sees
the wisp of veil still there. The rest is gone.
He peers about for Bradamante but she's
nowhere to be found. Has she moved on
to save that youth from those atrocities
that he had been sentenced to undergo anon?
Among those lying motionless on the ground
is the woman who'd guided them and she was down.
- 89 He picks her up and slings her onto his horse
and then, with her cloak, covers the face of his shield.
He rides away, feeling much remorse
at a victory so easy that it can't yield
honor to him. To lose is bad, but worse
is to win without skill or valor because you wield
a magical trinket like this that takes away
all risk and danger. What will people say?
- 90 Once he has covered the shield it is no great thing
to revive the woman. He does this as they ride
along the road to the city to try to bring
relief to that poor young man. But he's occupied

with this self-reproach that continues, simmering,
to which there's a simple solution. Off to the side
of the road is a deep well where a flock of sheep
after they have been fed retire to sleep.

91 Here he dismounts and takes the shield that so
troubles him. He finds a heavy stone
he can barely manage to lift. It's very slow
dragging it to the well. With many a groan
and grunt he does so, and then (you already know!)
he lashes the stone to the shield so that when it is thrown
into the well it will go to the bottom where
it will stay and, with his shame, be buried there.

92 It's a deep well and almost full to the brim,
and the shield plunks down and sinks. But is that the end?
There is Rumor that flies at once to speak of him
and what he has done. And this is enough to send
many knights and adventurers on the slim
chance of finding where our quixotic friend
secreted it. From France and Spain they come,
the wicked, the greedy, and the merely adventuresome.

93 They know it is somewhere, hidden well, but still
there, if only one may be lucky or shrewd
enough to figure it out. And someone will
sooner or later, they think. But maybe you'd
wonder whether the woman with him would spill
the beans, although that's a cynical attitude.
She kept the secret buried within her as
deep as the shield down in the well bottom was.

94 Some believed Ruggiero's gesture was wise,
while others took a rather different view
thinking that he was a fool, for in their eyes
such an advantage can be very handy to do

deeds deserving of praise to the very skies.
It's a nice question I'd rather leave to you
to decide for yourselves—if Ruggiero was silly (oh,
dear!) demonstrating such extreme punctilio.

- 95 Back at the castle, there is a slow but sure
recovery as the dazed and stupefied
men and women seem to recover. A cure?
Or only a remission? They are wide-eyed
and wonder what could have caused their discomfiture.
It looked as though every man and woman had died,
but they revive and greet one another, though fright
remains with them all after that dazzling light.
- 96 They are discussing and trying to diagnose
this instant pandemic, but no one has a clue.
Meanwhile there comes some news concerning those
who lived in the castle and those who were prisoners, too—
of the death of Pinabello. Can they suppose
that this report is reliable? If it's true,
how shall they all proceed? And how did he die?
Nobody seems to know how it happened or why.
- 97 What occurred was that Bradamante at last
overtook Pinabello in the wood
in a narrow defile where he couldn't flee, and fast
and thick were the thrusts of her sword that drew his blood
fifty, a hundred times, until he passed
out and away, shifting the balance to good
from evil in the world, and making it better
if only a little by ridding it of his fetor.
- 98 She intended then to return to the palace, but where
was the right road? Or any road in fact?
She wandered from mountain to valley, here and there,
but Fortune kept her from Ruggiero. She lacked

any hint of where she was. But I'll spare
us all, for it grows late, I think, and tact
requires that we suspend our tale for today.
On another evening, another canto, okay?

Canto Ventesimoterzo

- 1 We should all try to be good. Most of the time
virtue will be rewarded: in any case,
it does not bring shame with it the way a crime
does or the need to make amends. It says
in a proverb that man, whose life is not sublime,
wanders about in error; the mountain stays
just where it is, standing firm. Your virtue
unlike your vice will not distract or hurt you.

- 2 You see how Pinabello is repaid
for the wickedness he did, thinking he had
killed the maiden. That deed had hardly weighed
upon his conscience (if he had one). Bad
people have no remorse and are unafraid
of retribution. But of such a cad
God keeps accounts and sooner or later He
will see that sinners do not get off scot-free.

- 3 What's elegant is when the one who was
injured gets to inflict the punishment,
as Bradamante did here. In her just cause
she appears perhaps to have been heaven-sent
to do God's business and enforce his laws.
It makes no difference that Pinabello went
home to Altaripa in the wild
mountains in which he grew up as a child.

- 4 Altaripa was where Anselmo dwelt,
Pinabello's father, the old count
who raised this brat who everybody felt
was worthless (less than even a small amount).
Now in the dark wood Bradamante dealt
him many blows, of which I've given account.
He had no friends: the virtuous man relies
on these, but he had only his pained cries.
- 5 As I've already said I think, when Bradamante
had killed the dastardly knight, she tried to return
to Ruggiero, but the landmarks there were scanty
and she lost her sense of direction at some turn
(the fourth? the fifth?). Spinning like a bacchante
she gave up at last as she saw the red sun burn
on the western horizon and then sink out of sight
to add to the forest's darkness that of night.
- 6 No point in going on, or moving at all.
So she settles down on the grass beneath a tree,
sometimes to sleep and sometimes in the small
hours to look at the heavens where she can see
Saturn, Venus, and Mars, who rise and fall
with the other wandering gods. Even so, she,
waking or sleeping, focuses her mind
on Ruggiero whom she is trying to find.
- 7 What she most regrets is how she let
her wrath overcome her love, so that she left
Ruggiero to pursue the villain and get
even with him. But now she is bereft.
She accuses herself of this, and yet, and yet . . .
If she'd only paid attention and been deft
in her pursuit of Pinabello she might
not be lost in the forests of the night.

- 8 The weather is not bad, but her great sighs
are like a wind, and her tears are a storm of rain.
Inside her there's a squall, you realize,
and she is in discomfort and even pain.
But at last the dark relents a bit. Her eyes
see in the east the light that comes again
however slowly. With her horses she
proceeds to the east (toward the dawn, you see).
- 9 She had not gone very far when she reached the place
deep in the wood where not so long ago
the evil enchanter had kept her with his base
and cruel deceptions. And there (what do you know?)
was Astolfo, who'd made no progress with the case
of Rabican and how to dispose of him so
that he'd be in good hands and Astolfo's mind
would not be troubled at having left him behind.
- 10 The paladin had put his helmet by
just at this moment, and Bradamante knew
at once who he was. With a most joyful cry
she greeted him and came close to him to
give him a warm embrace and signify
her delight in seeing him, as good friends do.
(So that he would also be able to tell
who she was, she removed her helm as well.)
- 11 He was happy of course, for whom could he find
as a better person to whom he could give his steed
than she, who was, as I may perhaps remind
you all, the duke of Dordogne's daughter? Need
he look any further then? Either God or blind
chance had sent her. (These have sometimes agreed.)
She'd care for him well. And if Astolfo came back
she would return the horse and even his tack.

- 12 As a sister and brother long separated might
do, they embraced again and asked each other
how life had been going. Clearly, both were in quite
splendid shape in a world full of strife and bother
and rife with danger. With pride and great delight
Astolfo showed her the hippogryph he would rather
ride for a while than Rabican, although
the horse was fearless and by no means slow.
- 13 Bradamante had already seen this odd
and splendid hippogryph—with Atlas on
its back and poor Ruggiero, whom he had
held as a captive. She'd watched until they were gone,
disappearing into the distance. A bad
day that was as bad as any she'd known.
But none of that had been the hippogryph's own
fault, as Bradamante had always known.
- 14 Astolfo tells her of Rabican's virtues—how
if he started at the instant an archer shot
an arrow he could go faster than what the bow
let loose. Astolfo, moreover, would not
need his armor. Could she take it and stow
it away at Montalban? When he got
back from his travels he'd pick it up again.
It will, he says, be splendid to see her then.
- 15 He gives her the armor of course, because of its weight
which might impede his efforts to fly through the air.
He's reluctant to make the beast's burden too great.
He keeps his sword and his wonderful and rare
horn, which are plenty. He cannot anticipate
a need for anything else to carry or wear.
And the splendid lance that Argalia (Galafron's son)
once bore he gives her—to unhorse anyone!

- 16 Astolfo, having climbed on the flying steed,
starts him slowly and urges him gently higher,
only after a little while daring some speed
to maneuver a bit in an ever widening gyre.
Soon he is comfortable and he can heed
the animal's natural talents as a flier.
Far down on earth, where Bradamante peers
up, he shrinks in the distance and disappears.
- 17 I'd suppose he's like a pilot who, in port,
is worried about the rocks and the wind but once
he gets out into blue water becomes a sport,
unfurls all his sails and, reckless, runs
at breathtaking speed. So after a short
apprenticeship, Astolfo is doing stunts
the hippogryph enjoys and is more than willing
to perform for him. He thinks it's truly thrilling.
- 18 But what is Bradamante to do with this stuff?
Her horse, Astolfo's, Pinabello's? All
three, and now the armor, which is enough
to make a good-sized load in what we'd call
a caravan. What she'd like is a puff
of wind to pick her up and let her fall
at once at Ruggiero's side where she
belongs and would indeed prefer to be.
- 19 Maybe at Vallombrosa? But just then
a peasant comes by and she asks him to pile
all the armor on one of the horses, and when
he's done to lead it behind her for a while
on the way to that monastery, but again
she's not sure which way to go. The pedestrian
farmer has no reliable information
having all his life been confined to this location.

- 20 They wander along almost at random until
it is nearly noon and they come out of the wood,
and far away, atop a familiar hill,
she sees Montalban—which would be very good
except that to go and visit her family will
delay her meeting with Ruggiero. Should
she stop to visit, they will detain her there.
She is in love, but will her family care?
- 21 It's home after all, and she is torn between
her love for them and that which burns in her heart
for Ruggiero. (You know what I mean!)
But somebody might recognize her, some smart
peasant, or even a relative. To be seen
would make it worse, for they have been apart
for a long time now, and it would seem most rude
of her not to stop, being here in the neighborhood.
- 22 But if she leaves at once it may not come
up. She knows the roads and continues on her
way to the abbey. She has only traveled some
two or three miles (with her peasant groom upon her
left) when she meets her brother coming from
some errand for Charlemagne (which does him honor).
She doesn't have time to conceal her face, and he—
Alardo—greet her, as happy as he can be.
- 23 He's been assigning billets for troops and raising
new recruits in the region and meeting her now
by chance and so close to home is quite amazing.
They embrace again and ask each other how
their fortunes have gone, as each, of course, is praising
how well the other looks. And she must allow
Alardo to take her home with him. They proceed
together to Montalban at moderate speed.

- 24 Her mother, Beatrice, with tearful cheeks
greeted her with many kisses, for all of France
had been out searching for her. But no one speaks
a word of reproach, now that she's here. This chance
of embracing them all is lovely, but what she seeks
is the one embrace in the world that would truly enhance
her happiness—which is Ruggiero's. Her soul
is stamped with that and it is her whole heart's goal.
- 25 But if she cannot go there herself, she can
send someone to Vallombrosa to tell
Ruggiero where she is and that their plan
is still in effect, as he should know full well.
He should be baptized by some diocesan
cleric, perhaps a monsignor, which would dispel
objections that her family might make.
Do this for her and for their wedding's sake.
- 26 She sends by the same courier his steed
which is very dear to him, as she of course knows.
A splendid beast of stamina and speed,
matchless in France and Spain, and I suppose
anywhere else, except that one might need
to exempt *Brigliadoro*. And *Bayard*. Other than those,
Frontino (which was its name) was the finest horse
in the world, and Ruggiero had left him with remorse.
- 27 This happened when Ruggiero had ascended
into the air on the hippogryph and rose
up while, on the ground, *Bradamante* tended
the horse, which she sent to *Montalban* where those
grooms she knew would take care of him. The men did
wonderfully well, always paying close
attention to his needs for exercise
and frequent curry combing for bot flies.

- 28 She sets her women to work with dainty skill
embroidering in the finest golden thread
on white and mulberry silk flowers that will
bedeck his saddle cloth and, at his head,
the bridle too, so that Ruggiero will
know what labors love can perform. Instead
of just sending him back the way he was,
she'll show Ruggiero what talents his lady has.
- 29 She chooses her nurse's daughter, who happens to be
named "Hippalca" (*horse-leader* in Greek).
She will take the horse to him for she
is a faithful companion. Bradamante can speak
frankly to her and trust unreservedly
that she will fulfill her errand and will seek
Ruggiero, return his charger, and make clear
how the Fates have conspired to keep Bradamante here.
- 30 "You can make my apologies," she says,
"and tell him it isn't that I forgot that I
had promised to come to meet him. But some days,
the plans we have made we find we must modify.
Which of us is not, in many ways,
subject to the many vicissitudes by
which our lives are governed, willy-nilly?
It's frustrating and sad and often silly."
- 31 She had her mount a pony and into her hand
she put the elegant bridle they had made
for Frontino. She also gave her to understand
that if anyone tried to stop her, unafraid,
she should say to whom the horse belonged—the grand
Ruggiero! The chances that she might be waylaid
would be diminished practically to zero,
such was the reputation of that hero.

- 32 She gives her other instructions of what to say
to Ruggiero in her stead. She makes
certain Hippalca is able to convey
her mood and thoughts without any gross mistakes.
And then Hippalca sets off. She's on her way
through fields and forests and, on the path she takes,
she goes about ten miles and encounters no
one who threatens or even says hello.
- 33 But then at noon, as she descends a hill
on a winding trail she happens to confront
Rodomonte. He is on foot and still
accompanied by that malicious runt
(you do remember the dwarf?). There is a chill
of menace here, for the Moor has been on a hunt
for another horse—and she is leading one
as impressive as any animal under the sun.
- 34 He'd sworn that he would take the very first
horse he saw, and this one suits his taste,
but to take it from a maiden is the worst
thing he can think of. He would be disgraced!
He stared at it though with envy and he cursed
his luck. Where was the owner? If he faced
its master, he could fight for it then and there
in a passage at arms both honorable and fair.
- 35 As if in answer to his thought the maid
replies, "The animal's master, if he were here,
would by his strength and reputation dissuade
anyone's attempt to commandeer
this stallion." She appears quite unafraid
and Rodomonte says, "Then make it clear.
Who then is this knight of such renown?"
"Ruggiero," she declares, with a threatening frown.

- 36 “In that case,” Rodomonte says, “I can take the horse, since he is so great a knight. We’ll reckon up for its hire, man to man, with whatever tariff he may think is right. I am Rodomonte! And I am an easy fellow to find if he wants to fight. Wherever I am, people always know as if a spotlight were on me with its glow.
- 37 “Wherever I go I leave behind as grand a mark on the earth as a lightning bolt would do.” Saying this, he took the reins in hand and leapt on the charger’s back. Now, full of rue and anger, Hippalca made her reprimand in very strong terms that he didn’t listen to. He rode up the hill and did not turn around. Hippalca followed after him like a hound.
- 38 He is going, as we perhaps remember, to find Mandricardo and Doralice. You find that coming back? You call it to mind? But where he travels now, Hippalca too follows along, cursing him and his kind. What happens we’ll soon find out. Wise Turpin who first told this story interrupted it here and shifted the scene. The precedent is clear.
- 39 We’re back in the wood where Bradamante slew Pinabello. She’s just exited (right) when Zerbino arrives along with that terrible shrew he has with him. He sees the fallen knight whom he does not know from Adam’s ox (if you will permit a peculiar trope here). He is quite sad to see this corpse upon the ground with rivulets of blood from every wound.

- 40 One would think a hundred swords had hit
him all at once. The Scots knight took this in
with a cursory inspection, and when it
was done he looked to see if tracks had been
left by the killers to follow, at least for a bit.
Was the killing justified or was it a sin?
In order to learn the truth he'd have to stalk
the killers, catch up with them, and make them talk.
- 41 He tells Gabrina to wait for him and that he
will return quite soon. She defers to his
wishes and is willing to agree
but what she is thinking of perhaps is this—
that left alone with the corpse she will be free
to steal anything of value. It won't miss
whatever pretty trinkets she may find,
for dead men aren't greedy and don't mind.
- 42 She has to keep it secret and can't take
large pieces—armor, the helmet, or such stuff.
But the rings on the fingers? She can surely make
room for them somewhere. And with enough
cunning she can wear, for goodness' sake,
his belt under her gown. She is a tough
and devious woman, you must realize,
a fact she does not try much to disguise.
- 43 Zerbino, who had lost Bradamante's trail
in the twists and turns of the wood, returned to her.
The light in the western sky was starting to fail
and either they had to stay there where they were
or find some shelter somewhere in this vale
or in a nearby town one might prefer
to sleeping on the ground in a rude tent.
The choice was clear enough, and off they went.

- 44 A couple of miles on they find a fair-sized town. It's Altariva, and they decide to seek an inn and spend the night, but there is turmoil in the streets. Someone has died, and people are weeping (some are tearing their hair). They wonder who. Zerbino takes someone aside and asks who it could be that everyone is mourning for—and it's Count Anselmo's son.
- 45 The man explains that word has come of how Pinabello was found in a narrow pass somewhere up in the mountains. Zerbino now makes the connection. And naturally he has some worry on this point. He cannot allow suspicion to fall on him. He's sure it was the man he saw on the road, but he takes care not to let anyone know that they were there.
- 46 Soon thereafter the bier arrives with lights of torches and firebrands, and there is more lamentation and loud wailing. The knight's father, Count Anselmo, who glowers, is more angry than sad—and he is within his rights, for a crime has been committed and to restore his dignity and his son's the criminal must be found and put to death, as is only just.
- 47 The city is all in mourning and the black crepe is everywhere as it should be at the death of the count's son and heir (for back then they did these things with pageantry), but Anselmo in an all but demoniac passion was fixed on avenging the murder and he announced a lavish reward for anyone with information about who killed his son.

- 48 It's a large enough amount to cause a stir throughout the town which is of course abuzz with speculation. These rumors get to her, the meanest, vilest woman there ever was (and the only one who was there and can aver that Zerbino was innocent). But now she has a way to ruin him and also make a fair amount of money for mischief's sake.
- 49 Gabrina (the mind boggles) goes to the lord to name Zerbino as the one who did the terrible deed. And it isn't just her word, for she shows him his son's belt (the one she hid under her dress). Such an enormous reward can elicit false information, heaven forbid, but physical evidence never lies and he relies on its absolute veracity.
- 50 Now he weeps and raises his hands to the sky not in grief but gratitude for he can have revenge and thereby satisfy his fixed obsession. In order to catch the man he thinks is the killer he orders troops to stand by all around the inn. It's a sensible plan for Zerbino is not expecting trouble and he is sound asleep, as Anselmo expects him to be.
- 51 They throw him into a dungeon and chain him there. Count Anselmo issues his decree. He'll die, of course, but to make all men aware of what a great crime this was he is to be quartered, alive (at least for a while), where he committed the crime. There's no necessity for any kind of trial. The count is quite sure he's guilty and that his judgment is right.

- 52 The morning dawns in particular splendor with blue
skies bedecked with yellow and roseate clouds,
but the mood of the streets is utterly black and you
can hear the shouts of “Death to him!” from the crowds.
They follow along out of the city walls to
that spot in the mountain pass that a willow shrouds
where Pinabello was found and Zerbino today
will suffer the penalty he has been ordered to pay.
- 53 But God, who never abandons those who trust
in his goodness and favors the innocent, had prepared
for this eventuality as he must
often do in our fallen world. He spared
Zerbino and prevented this unjust
punishment, for now the golden-haired
Orlando appears. He sees the excited crowd
and also the wretched knight whose head is bowed.
- 54 Isabella is with him. (You will recall
he rescued her back in the cave. She is
the King of Galicia’s daughter. The sea squall
wrecked her ship, and the brigands, after this,
took her captive. Her heart and soul are all
Zerbino’s, as, reciprocally, his
are hers. This is perhaps a coincidence,
but such things happen, whether or not they make sense.)
- 55 At any rate, she asks him what that throng
could be down on the plain, and he has no
idea, but it could be that something’s wrong,
in which case it’s his knightly duty to go
and see if there’s anything he can do among
all these exercised people—a tableau
that might be dangerous. He is of a mind
therefore to ask the maiden to stay behind.

- 56 Orlando sees Zerbino and right away
recognizes a man of noble blood.
He asks the fellow, then, if he can say
what got him into this fix—which isn't good.
The paladin, whose bearing is soigné,
inspires Zerbino's trust, as of course it would
in anyone who is not dense or uncouth.
Zerbino therefore tells him—briefly—the truth.
- 57 Zerbino's distressing story he believed,
but he was absolutely convinced when he heard
that Count Anselmo was involved. He received
the name of that scoundrel as a confirming word
of wicked doings. Clermont had conceived
a hatred for the Maganzese for absurd
and outrageous behavior of many a generation
and Orlando accepted Zerbino's accusation.
- 58 "Let him loose," Orlando shouted to
the guards, "or I will kill you, every man
jack of you!" Their captain called back "Who
in hell are you? Is it your threat or plan
to deal with us as raging fires do
with scarecrows made of straw? You think you can
succeed against so many?" He lowered his lance
and charged against the paladin of France.
- 59 The armor he has on is very fine
having been taken from Zerbino, but still
there's a limit to what the armorer's design
can do. Orlando's lance lands on the bill
of the helmet where it doesn't scratch the shine,
but the force of the blow is great enough to kill
the Altaripan guard on the instant (aha!)
by fracturing his cervical vertebra.

- 60 Then, without moving his lance from its rest, he strikes another in the chest and runs him through.
He leaves the lance there, and draws his sword (the likes of which they have not seen, nor what it can do).
With Durindana he cleaves one's cranium (yikes!) and cleanly beheads another. He then turns to the rest and slits their throats with gashes he inflicts on those who are too slow to flee.
- 61 It's carnival carnage, as Orlando cuts and splits and stabs and slashes. Though many run away, he is up on his horse, of course, and it's very much faster and very much stronger than they are, who, losing their shields and out of their wits, are cut down in this most one-sided fray.
Some climb trees and others hide in a cave as men might do who aren't exactly brave.
- 62 Turpin does the accounting, and his guess is that of the hundred and twenty guards who were there Orlando must have killed eighty, more or less.
He returns at last to poor Zerbino where he left him a while before in great distress.
The extent of Zerbino's gratitude I dare not attempt to describe. We'll stipulate that his thankfulness was evident and great.
- 63 Orlando cut his bonds and helped him don his armor the guards' captain had been wearing.
After he had strapped and buckled it on, he looked at the lady who now approached and, staring at her, he recognized that she was none other than Isabella! His love and caring for her still burned within him and his ardor.
The heart in his bosom now beat faster and harder.

- 64 He'd heard that she had drowned, and he is filled with joy to see her alive, but mixed with this warm feeling there's another, for he is chilled because she is with Orlando who was his rescuer just a while ago having killed all those guards. And he's sure Orlando is her lover. So his happiness was abated, or say that with it great pain alternated.
- 65 When he thought that she was dead, his feelings were of grief and sadness, and there was not mixed in this bitterness of jealousy. Could he prefer that she had drowned to seeing Orlando win her heart? He cannot fight the knight for her or challenge the man who, just now, saved his skin. What kind of love is this? It's complicated and worse than what he could have anticipated.
- 66 He's also ashamed of the feeling of relief that he cannot fight with Orlando, which would be at best a risky business, brutal and brief, and that for him to achieve a victory would be, to his best knowledge and belief, most unlikely. It was curious, we must admit, for his debt allowed him to avoid a fight—just as he wanted to do.
- 67 The three of them ride along for a little while and they find a spring where they stop to rest. It's there that Orlando takes off his helmet and, with a smile, suggests that Zerbino do so too. The fair lady recognizes her lover at last, and I'll not describe her joy except to compare her face to a faded flower that, after the rain has stopped and the sun comes out, is lovely again.

- 68 She runs to her lover and throws her arms around
his neck. She cannot say a word but sighs
and weeps for joy. Orlando stares at the ground,
but now he cannot help but realize
that this must be Zerbino, whom they've found
at last. And Isabella, although she tries,
cannot yet speak a word to either one
until her gasps and sighs of joy are done.
- 69 Finally, after many attempts, she succeeds
in telling Zerbino of how the paladin has
been courteous and respectful. In his deeds
of kindness to her Orlando always was
the very parfit gentle knight who leads
an exemplary existence. And because
she has said this, Zerbino feels much better,
and is once more Orlando's grateful debtor.
- 70 There would have been between the knights profuse
expressions of gratitude and modest replies,
but they heard a rustle of foliage and the shoes
of horses on the turf. Each one applies
himself to putting his helmet back on, for who's
about to approach? A friend or foe? Their eyes
make out a knight and a girl. And who are they?
What do they want? And what do they have to say?
- 71 It's Mandricardo who has been searching for
Orlando to avenge the deaths of his friends
Alzirdo and Manilardo in the war.
His rate of pursuit had slowed a bit as it tends
to do if a woman is with you, for it takes more
care to ride side-saddle (though that depends
on the rider's skill, I suppose). And on the horse
beside him was Doralice. (You remember of course!)

- 72 Mandricardo had freed her from those men
and brought her into his power (some cantos ago).
The Saracen knight had no idea just then
that it was the great Orlando before him, although
clearly he was an important personage. When
he saw them, he glanced at Zerbino but, head to toe,
inspected the other one slowly and without speaking.
Then he said, “You are the one I have been seeking.
- 73 “I have been tracking you for ten days,” he
said, “spurred on by what you did at the walls
of Paris, slaying a thousand men. But to me
one survivor came to tell of the falls
of the men of Norizia that he could see
and those of Tremisen at your hands. It appalls
and enrages me and I have followed you
to do you whatever injury I can do.
- 74 “I know you from your emblems and devices,
although I wondered if you might not conceal
all these to hide in a crowd. But with as nice as
your physique and bearing is, I feel
that I’d have known you anyway. It’s twice as
good to meet you honorably and deal
frankly man to man in your last hour—
if to arrange that is now in my power.”
- 75 “You are,” Orlando answered, “a man of high
spirits and great courage to say such things.
I will remove my helmet so that you and I
may confront each other here. Your effort brings
you face to face with the man you mean to defy.
The rest of your quest—in which a brave man flings
a challenge—we can grant with no delay.
Test my valor, sir? Why, yes you may.”

- 76 Mandricardo thanks him for this good
look at the face of the man he has been trailing.
He is grateful on both counts, he says, and they should
move on now to the other business, failing
which, he would not show such gratitude.
These combats, though, are usually entailing
swords and maces as well as lances, but
Orlando sees not one of these weapons. What?
- 77 Not on the saddle. Not behind him. He
asks Mandricardo how he intends to fight
without all his equipment. If he should be
knocked down, or his lance should break, what kind of plight
would he be in? The other, with some esprit,
answers that he is sure he'll be all right.
He has battled, he says, on many and many a day
and has caused his opponents much pain and dismay.
- 78 "I've made a vow," he explains, "that I will not hold
a sword until I have Durindana again
in my hand. The rest of the armor is old.
Hector wore it, the bravest of Trojan men,
who for a thousand years has been laid in the cold
ground. The paladin Orlando, when
he killed my father took it, and out of pride
I scorn to have any other sword at my side.
- 79 "Nothing else is lacking, but when I meet
with him, I shall take it back and, at the same time,
avenge my father Agrican. It will be sweet,
for the sword was wrongfully taken from him and I'm
certain there must have been treachery. His defeat
of my father must have been by a trick or crime
for which, when I encounter him, I shall extract
my retribution for his wicked act."

- 80 The Count could no longer keep silent but made reply:
“Anyone who claims the fight was not
fair and honest tells a contemptible lie.
But what you seek is here and you have got
your chance at last, for I declare that I
am Orlando, and this sword I have is what
you claim is yours. You may have it now
but you must earn it—and I think you know how.
- 81 “Even though the sword is rightfully mine,
we’ll fight for it observing in every detail
the courtesies of knighthood with their fine
demands for fairness that must, of course, prevail.
I shall not now use the sword but assign
it freely to the winner. If I fail,
then take it when you kill or capture me.
Meanwhile, I’ll hang it from this handy tree.”
- 82 They move away from one another as much
as half a bow-shot, then turn and put the spurs
to their horses’ flanks in order to do such
damage as they can. Each one prefers
to aim for the other’s eye-slits where a touch
can do the greatest harm. But what occurs
is that their lances shatter into pieces
like icicles. But neither of them ceases.
- 83 They go at each other. A good-sized stump remains,
the piece near the butt. It is as if they were two
brawling bumpkins beating each other’s brains
with cudgels, fighting, as farmers sometimes do,
over water rights or the line between one’s grains
and the other’s orchard. What it may lack in true
style, it makes up for in its energy,
and I rather think it would have been something to see.

- 84 The broken ends shatter further and they
are left with their bare fists with which to beat
on one another's armor in a way
that pops some rivets where the pieces meet
or snags and rips the chain mail where it may
have been a bit exposed. In the great heat
of the struggle they are banging each other with
hammer blows like those of a burly smith.
- 85 The Saracen realizes that every blow
hurts the one who gives it more than him
whose armor receives it. Therefore there is no
point in going on this way. A dim
idea crosses his mind—how long ago
Hercules fought with Antaeus—and that whim
becomes a plan by which he thinks he may
overcome Orlando and win the day.
- 86 He grabs Orlando around the chest to heave,
pull, and push back and forth to shake
him off his horse to the ground. He may believe
he can beat him there. Orlando contrives to take
his opponent's bridle off, perhaps to deceive
the Saracen into making some mistake
in a plan that may involve trying to tangle
him up in the tack either to trap or strangle.
- 87 The Saracen tries to crush him to death or squeeze
the breath from the paladin, who holds on tight,
clutching the sides of his saddle with his knees,
but the girths give way and Orlando, in the fight,
is flung abruptly to the ground, though he's
hardly aware of this, his left and right
feet being still in the stirrups, although the force
of the fall has separated him and his horse.

- 88 Remember too that he's in armor that
makes an enormous racket when he hits
the ground. You can perhaps imagine what
it was like. And Mandricardo's horse has its
bridle off. The animal startles at
the noise. Indeed, it's almost out of its wits.
It breaks and runs in panic. And where it flies
it carries Mandricardo, you realize.
- 89 Doralice sees him take off and she
follows. To lose him, she thinks, would be a disaster.
He's trying to make the horse slow down and he
beats it, for it is the horse and he is the master,
but this only further frightens the beast, as we
might expect, and makes it run all the faster.
It is running away, as he is too. The disgrace is
as breathtaking as the frightened horse's pace is.
- 90 The poor beast keeps running. He's left the road
and goes cross-country, this way and that, and should
have kept on going that way, would not have slowed,
except for the deep gully that it could
not quite clear with Mandricardo's load,
and it fell back and rolled over. Its rider would
have been killed except that he was lucky and
got up unhurt, surprised that he could stand.
- 91 Bizarrely enough, the horse gets up as well,
but there is no way to ride him. The bridle is gone
and the Saracen would require one to tell
the animal where to go once he got on.
He stands there feeling stupid. It's a hell
of a problem. But Doralice, coming upon
him, has an idea: "You can take mine for
your horse. Mine doesn't need it anymore."

- 92 Would it be discourteous to accept
or, worse, humiliating? The Saracen frets,
but fortune solves his problem. She has kept
another option open and he gets
a bridle from another horse. (Except
for theirs, what other horse is there?) She lets
Gabrina appear, who, after she'd betrayed
Zerbino, fled Altaripa, very afraid.
- 93 She is still dressed with the duds that she got from
Pinabello's mistress and is a fright
but she has a terrific palfrey, as good as they come,
and it has the bridle the Saracen needs in his plight.
She takes him unawares, for he had some
trouble emerging from the gully. The knight
and Doralice look at her and they
both burst into laughter. What can one say?
- 94 Her face? It's like that of a rosy-ass baboon,
except that one insults the simian side
of that comparison. Mandricardo soon
recovers himself, stops laughing, and with a wide
grin removes her palfrey's opportune
bridle, and then, entirely satisfied,
he shouts and slaps her horse's rump so it
takes off in fright, in flight, lickety-split.
- 95 The old woman is paralyzed with terror
as valleys and mountains pass by in a blur
with leaps over tree trunks, rocks, and ditches where or
when they appear. It's funny, but I prefer
to turn from her (we really do not care or
are interested much) to the likelier
subject of Orlando who, by now,
has repaired his broken saddle straps somehow.

- 96 He got back up on the horse and for some while
waited for the Saracen to return,
but that didn't happen. So, with some show of style,
he decided that he would search for the knight and with stern
resolve set out to do this. But with a smile
to his companions for whom he had concern,
he bade farewell to the lovers with his wishes
for a future that would be happy and propitious.
- 97 Zerbino grieved and Isabella wept
in their tender feelings for the paladin.
They wanted to go with him, but he kept
refusing—it would not at all be in
proper form, while he tried to intercept
an enemy, to have some masculine
companion with him to whom he could look for aid.
It might suggest that he was, himself, afraid.
- 98 He asked them one last favor—that if they see
the Saracen anywhere, they should let him know
Orlando will remain in the region for three
days, and after that he plans to go
to the banners with the golden fleurs-de-lys
and join with the army of Charlemagne, although
he would be available there to meet
and decide the issue by victory or defeat.
- 99 The Count retrieves Durindana from the tree
and puts it on again. Then they set out,
the lovers and Orlando, and we see
them going in different directions, with one route
south and the other north. But there must be
a delay for Orlando as he looks about
for the Saracen. In two days there is no word
of Mandricardo's passing that anyone's heard.

- 100 Somewhere on his meander he comes upon
a meadow in which a crystal stream runs through
to refresh the many flowers on its lawn
over which boughs are offering their shade to
a lovely spot (or a prolegomenon
to catastrophe: these pastoral moments do
often end badly). Therefore, let us keep
alert. Oh, yes, there's a shepherd and his sheep.
- 101 A perfectly idyllic spot, and he thinks
this is a good place for him to rest.
The armor is hot, and he can work out the kinks
he sometimes gets in his back. But clearly the best
part is the brook from which the shepherd drinks,
and he could have some too. But you have guessed . . .
Something isn't good here. All of this
is a set-up for something other than sheer bliss.
- 102 Did I mention the trees? Along the bank there are
trees, with names and initials that couples have
carved in the bark to mark the particular
place they kissed or some such thing and to save
the spot to come back to. On one, not too far
up, Orlando saw something that gave
him a turn and occasioned profound sorrow,
his lady's name: *Angelica and Medoro*.
- 103 (You noted, I hope, the shepherd whom I just
mentioned. It was in his cottage that
they stayed. Ah, yes!) Orlando is nonplussed,
because there are more carvings, quite a lot.
In fact they're everywhere. And his disgust
increases as he sees that there are not
many trees they've missed. It's hard to find
a trunk of any size they haven't signed.

- 104 What could this be? It can't mean what it seems
to mean. He racks his brain to figure ways
to turn it around. Is Medoro from some dreams?
Or is it perhaps a nickname or code phrase
that means Orlando? But all his far-fetched schemes
collapse in an instant. He is in a daze
and a part of him knows that he is being absurd
in his efforts to neutralize the dreadful word.
- 105 The worse he feels, the more outré his thought
becomes. He is like a bird that's in a net
and struggles, realizing that it is caught,
but only gets tangled in it further and yet
further. It flaps its wings as perhaps it ought
(what else does it know?) but the fowler has his pet
or meal, or hat decoration. Orlando too
struggles in vain to deny what he knows is true.
- 106 There is ivy in festoons above his head,
leafy swags and jabots, or what you will.
The point is that it's shady there—which led
the lovers here in the heat of noon to fill
the time with pleasant dalliance. As I have said
their names are in charcoal or chalk (they're versatile)
or carved with the point of a knife in the soft bark.
Orlando's mood is becoming increasingly dark.
- 107 What tears it, though, is that as he stares at these
graffiti he sees a poem, for heaven's sake.
A conventional bit of verse, intended to please,
what any competent courtier could make.
It doesn't have any explicit vulgarities,
but it's clear enough so there's no room for mistake.
It's a couple of stanzas long, and it's all he needs
for his heart to break as he stands in the grove and reads:

- 108 “O lovely trees, O grass so lush and green,
O limpid stream that babbles of delight,
how sweet you are to grace this blessed scene
where Galafron’s daughter Angelica (many a knight
has yearned for her in vain) became my queen
and, naked in my arms, held me with tight
embraces and sweet kisses for which I
am grateful to all of you for standing by.
- 109 “May every cavalier and damosel
who finds this lovely grove enjoy it too
as we have done, and may they wish you well
for the kindnesses you show to lovers who
happen on this place where sweet nymphs dwell
and sing their songs of love the whole day through
not only to add their grace but also to keep
the shepherd out with his flock of greedy sheep.”
- 110 It was written in Arabic, which he understood
as well as Latin. That tongue had kept him from
injuries and shame because he could
converse in it rather than stand there dumb.
But for all the good it had done him, now he would
rather not have known a word of it. Numb,
Orlando reread it and felt his stomach sink
(but not at the anticlimax, I rather think).
- 111 He reads it yet again. Indeed he tries
to deconstruct it. Reception theory has not
yet reared its fuzzy head, but his rubbed eyes
can’t make it go away or alter what
is says so clearly. Relief, contrariwise,
is in incomprehension and to that
he now resorts. His mind is fixed on a rock,
as dumb as the rock, and he is in total shock.

- 112 Listen, I've been there. This agony is the worst
of all the mental pains we undergo.
He gives himself over to sorrow as the first
anodyne for such a horrendous blow.
His head is down and his chin is on his breast.
His face is now tormented and shows no
slightest sign of the pride it used to proclaim
to one and all, but grief and desperate shame.
- 113 But he has not quite collapsed yet. If you think
of a flask with a big belly and narrow neck,
you can turn it upside down to pour a drink
and the passage confines the liquid so as to check
the flow and it comes slowly, plink, plink, plink.
So too with him. He is a walking wreck
who still can move. His injury is disguised
and he is not yet totally paralyzed.
- 114 He's back to thinking that it cannot be.
This is a lie, a forgery, a trick
someone is playing on him, and he will see
what it's about or why some cruel or sick
person could have inflicted this misery
upon him or insult to her. With a gentle kick,
he has Brigliadoro carry him away
from that vile place where he cannot bear to stay.
- 115 The chances of these hopes, he knows, are slim,
but there may be some bizarre concatenation
of circumstances combining against him . . .
The sun is setting. In this grim situation
one looks for lodging, and not far in the dim
and fading light are signs of civilization,
a farmhouse with fragrant smoke from a cooking fire.
It's all that a sad and tired knight could desire.

- 116 He dismounts there and a boy takes his horse. Another helps him out of his armor and takes his spurs. Like a sleepwalker or a patient with some other mental disease he goes inside. He prefers not to bother with supper. He tells their mother that he'd as soon go right to bed. She defers to the sad knight. There's nothing he requires. Orlando bids her goodnight and then retires.
- 117 Instead of supper, he eats his heart out. He is miserable. He looks around the room and up on the walls, what on earth does he see but more graffiti, visible in the gloom, evidence that this cottage had to be where they stayed? Orlando must now assume that it's true. He wants to ask his host for more information to make his heart more sore.
- 118 He decides he won't. But it doesn't matter at all. The farmer, seeing that he's so sad, decides to cheer him up with a story. He can recall these lovers that stayed here recently. He prides himself on this and in order to console the knight he narrates the story he thinks provides diversion and entertainment. It's not to spite him, but a quite misguided effort to delight him.
- 119 He tells how, at Angelica's request, he carried the wounded Medoro here and he recuperated after weeks of rest and Angelica's care. And he also tells how she fell in love with Medoro and her breast was much more deeply wounded, one could see, than he had been in fighting. She was transported as if she had been elaborately courted.

- 120 Even though she was daughter of a king,
the greatest in the east, and he was a mere
footsoldier, she dismissed this as a thing
beneath her notice. And it was right here
that they joined together in marriage, with a ring
and all the rest. To pay for their stay, the dear
woman gave the farmer a very great
gift, a jewel. He asks the knight to wait.
- 121 The shepherd has someone bring it out to show
Orlando what a marvel it is, and this
is the ax that delivers at last the mortal blow,
decapitating him. His sorrow is
beyond all human measuring. Although
he tries to keep it from the shepherd, his
breath is labored. He gasps a bit and sighs,
and he seems to have some trouble with his eyes.
- 122 He goes back to bed and, alone, allows at last
his feelings to express themselves in moans,
a flood of tears on his cheeks that run down fast
to bedew his beard, and pitiable groans.
He rolls back and forth on the bed as each new blast
of emotion makes him shudder. A bed of stones,
a couch of nettles could not have been any worse,
or even a coffin bouncing along in a hearse.
- 123 It can't hurt more, but of course it then
does, as he realizes that this was the bed
in which they must have romped together when
they were the shepherd's guests. The feathers are lead,
and the coverlet is on fire. He gets up again
as quickly as a farm boy who lays his head
down on the grass to sleep and sees a snake
coiled near him and realizes his mistake.

- 124 The bed, the house, the shepherd are hateful, and he
does not wait for moonrise, let alone dawn,
but gets himself dressed and armed and prepares to flee
to otherness and elsewhere. He gets up on
Brigliadoro and ventures out where he's free
to give voice to his rage and grief and none
can hear him shriek and roar like a wounded beast
in an agony that has to be released.
- 125 He does not stop or even now and then
subside but night and day he weeps and wails,
and fleeing from towns and villages of men
lies on the forest's hard ground and he rails
at the universe and then he moans again
in wordless weeping and sighing that assails
sense itself. A tiny part of him sees
and is surprised by his capacities.
- 126 "These are not tears that I am shedding, but blood.
Tears are inadequate; something much more precious
has to be shed—my vital essence should
pour out on the ground to mark this inauspicious
moment in my life or, if it could,
end it altogether as vile and vicious.
I only wish that it were within the powers
of grief to make these my last bitter hours.
- 127 "These are not sighs, which sometimes can subside
in a temporary truce, but they express
a metaphysical torment. I have tried
reason, but to no avail. My distress
is the punishment of Love, for whom I'd have died
but he keeps me alive to torture, nevertheless,
in a monstrous demonstration of ill will
and an appetite for pain no one can fill.

- 128 “I am not Orlando. He is dead
and buried. This is a ghost, a zombie, or
some wraith from the underworld whose heart is lead.
She did this to me, she! All you who adore
some maiden with your soul, listen instead
to my sad story of wretchedness and more
disgrace than I can describe. Infidelity
threatens all noble men. Hearken to me!”
- 129 He wandered in a daze until the light
of day broke in the east and he looked about
to see where chance had brought him. It was quite
bizarre to see that he was, without a doubt,
back at that grove where they were wont to write
their names and initials. This drove him further out
of his mind. There was no ounce of him that wasn't
hatred, rage, and everything else unpleasant.
- 130 He drew his sword and hacked at the rocks and trees
letting the chips fall anywhere as he
obliterated every sign of these
self-advertising lovers. Ecology
be damned. He wrecked it so it could never please
lovers, shepherds, or passers-by. His spree
obliterated each and every thing,
even including that bubbling crystal spring.
- 131 And how, you ask, could he manage that? He took
branches, tree trunks, clods of earth, and rocks
and threw them in. The water now had the look
of a murky sewer where you wouldn't water your flocks
much less drink yourself. At last he shook
the sweat out of his eyes (for fury mocks
even such strength as his). His rage had not
diminished at all, but his body now was shot.

- 132 He fell on the grass and stared up at the sky.
For three days and three nights he did not move.
The pain continued and even grew worse. In a high
fever he writhed and moaned. (All this for love!)
On the fourth day he took off his armor to try
to diminish the burning, but it did not improve.
Both plate and mail he removed and then he scattered
them here and there at random. It hardly mattered.
- 133 It wasn't merely his armor but clothing as well,
flinging them hither and thither. In a trance
he wandered up the hillside and down the dell
having discarded his shoes and his shirt and pants.
Here began his terrifying spell
of utter madness—a hideous circumstance.
His hairy belly and naked backside were
signs of a sickness that does not often occur.
- 134 He's raving mad, as they say, in a perfect frenzy
which somehow makes him stronger. With his bare hands
he pulls tall trees from the ground. Not Freud or Ferenczi
ever described such cases, but one understands
that he was totally *pazzo*. The citizens he
passed were frightened by such extravagance.
Who has seen such strength of suffering? He's
inhuman, going around uprooting trees.
- 135 Alders, oaks, and towering elms, they were all
like weeds and underbrush that a fowler clears
to set his nets in order to capture small
birds. But this was something that, when one hears
about it, one tends to doubt. Plucking up tall
beeches as if they were fennel stalks? My dears,
in those heroic days such things could be,
despite their seeming implausibility.

- 136 The shepherds leave their flocks to come and stare
at this phenomenon as he turns woodland
into meadows to graze one's animals there.
But I worry lest the canto we have at hand
has gone on for too long. I'd rather spare
your patience. Supply should never exceed demand,
so we'll take another break and, later perhaps,
resume, for some of us are in need of naps.

Canto Ventesimoquarto

- 1–75 *Zerbino and Isabella set out to find Orlando, and they get to that glade the paladin has wrecked. They find his corselet and helmet and Brigliadoro. Then they find Durindana. A shepherd boy explains to them how Orlando has gone mad. Zerbino gathers up all the armor and the sword and sets them up near a pine tree with a notice saying that this all belongs to the Paladin Orlando and that no man should touch it who is unwilling to stand a test of arms with him. Mandricardo, of course, now arrives, sees the armor and the sword, and takes Durindana, explaining that it is rightfully his and suggesting that Orlando is only feigning madness in order to avoid a continuation of their fight. Zerbino challenges the Saracen, and they fight in a splendid clash in which Zerbino is wounded in seven or eight places. (Mandricardo's armor is enchanted.) Isabella is gravely concerned, and she asks Doralice to intercede with Mandricardo. The knights yield to their request and suspend the battle. Zerbino, badly wounded, follows Isabella as she leads him away.*

- 76 His strength is gone. He cannot go on. His mind
imagines a spring where he can rest and drink.
The maiden looks for one. But can she find
a surgeon somewhere? No. She watches him sink

further but she has no idea what kind
of care he needs as he teeters at the brink
of the grave to which we all must go, and she
is quite heartbroken, as we would expect her to be.

- 77 She complains to Heaven, “Why did I not drown
out there on the ocean? To live to this
wretched moment?” Zerbino, lying down,
looks up at her with more concern than for his
own deep wounds. He tries hard not to frown
as he speaks to her and says that they will miss
each other but their love will remain alive
forever, or as long as she may survive.
- 78 His only regret is that he leaves her alone
without protection. But on the other hand,
at least he gets to die here with his own
true love to give him comfort. “Understand
that you are my life, and all the joy I have known
and have loved in this vile world. My one demand
of Heaven is that it protect you as I
would do if I were not about to die.
- 79 “If the judgment I shall meet is adverse, in which
case I go to Hell, I swear to you
that none of the horrors there, the flaming pitch
and all the rest of the tricks of the devil’s crew
will pain me as much as losing you and the rich
treasure of your company. This is true,
and I swear it by those lips, those eyes, those tresses
that captured me, and all your lovelinesses.”
- 80 Hearing this, Isabella bent her face
to Zerbino’s to bestow a last kiss. She
was like a rose in some unnoticed place
that is not plucked so that it fades to be

a ghostly version of itself. In case
he did not comprehend her misery,
she told him that she would not let him die
alone. She'd join him in eternity.

81 "I will follow, either to Heaven or Hell.
Our spirits must be released together to stay
together as they have been. I cannot dwell
on the earth alone, and either sorrow may
dispatch me, or that sword will do as well
to pierce my breast so I can go away
from a world that has grown dull and lost its meaning."
She subsided then into a wordless keening.

82 She managed to add that they would surely have
a happier fate in death than in life. Perhaps
someone might happen along to dig them a grave
and bury them together. She let words lapse
and with kiss after kiss attempted vainly to save
what flickers of life remained. No thunderclaps,
but only a slow diminuendo would mark
his gradual descent into the dark.

83 With the last of his feeble breath Zerbino said,
"I pray and beseech that you do no such thing.
I command you to remain here when I've fled,
until the Lord in Heaven elects to bring
you to him. Life should not be forfeited.
Some angel, I know, has taken you under his wing
and will protect you with that greater love
known only to the spirits who dwell above.

84 "Heaven sent Orlando to rescue you
from the dangers of that dark cave. And then later
when you were at sea and in danger, it came through,
and from Odorico's abuse there was a greater

power that protected you—as you knew.
Can you ignore your destiny or fate or
whatever it is? Death’s alternative
must be your last, my dearest. You must live!”

85 That’s what he said, or thought and meant to say,
but his last words weren’t audible. He was
a candle running out of wax, its ray
guttering out as you watch it. But because
Isabella’s attention was fixed on him, she may
have nonetheless understood as someone does
in church when a prayer is mumbled. You can’t hear it
clearly but you are still in touch with its spirit.

86 He is stretched out icy cold, and her tears fall
as if to bathe the bloody corpse. She wails
and shrieks, and her loud cries resound through all
the woodland for many miles around. She assails
her breast and her cheeks in what one would have to call
a frenzy, tearing herself with her fingernails.
She tugs at her hair and continues to exclaim,
repeatedly calling out Zerbino’s name.

87 She very well might have reached for the sword to use
on herself, as she had been sorely tempted to do,
ignoring Zerbino’s plea or command (you choose).
But a hermit appeared whose habit it was to come to
this spring to drink, and he could not excuse
an act of self-destruction. The only true
peace, he told her, came from dedication
to God—either in action or contemplation.

88–115 *The hermit loads Zerbino on his horse and leads Isabella to a convent
in Provence. They avoid inhabited places because war is everywhere,
and indeed a knight blocks their way. Ariosto promises to return to
them later. Mandricardo, meanwhile, is resting from his fight when a*

knight rides up whom Doralice recognizes as Rodomonte. He is coming to avenge himself upon Mandricardo for having taken Doralice away from him. They challenge and insult each other, and then fight, but the combat is interrupted by a messenger from King Agramant summoning them to help him in his moment of need, besieged as he is by Charlemagne. Mandricardo's horse has been killed in the fight, but Brigliadoro happens to wander by.

[Canto XXV omitted]

Canto Ventesimosesto

1—98 *Ruggiero, Ricciardetto (Bradamante's twin brother), and Aldigiero of Clermont are on their way to supervise a ransoming of hostages when they see a knight approaching. The knight turns out to be Marfisa, who offers to join them. They have no idea that she's a woman, but they accept. The hostage exchange goes badly and there is a general brawl that breaks out at the end of which the victors untie Malagigi and Viviano (the hostages), unpack the treasure, and take off their helmets, at which time it becomes clear to them that Marfisa is a woman. (She has admired Ruggiero's valor in the encounter, and it will later be revealed that he is her brother.)*

They have a feast at a nearby spring, one of the four that Merlin created in France. It is enclosed in marble on which Merlin carved splendid prophetic reliefs. Malagigi explains that these are events that have not yet come to pass but will, in seven hundred years, in the exploits of Francis I and others. The party rests for a while, and then Hippalca shows up (from whom Rodomonte had taken Ruggiero's horse, Frontino). Ruggiero sets out with Hippalca to find Rodomonte. They take one road but, by another, Rodomonte and Mandricardo show up at the fountain. Mandricardo has Doralice with him and, to provide a companion for Rodomonte, he decides to take Marfisa and give her to him. One at a time, Viviano, and then Malagigi, and then

Ricciardetto joust with Mandricardo in the defense of Marfisa, but Mandricardo defeats the first two, and Ricciardetto's horse falls, so he, too, is a loser. Marfisa then puts on armor to defend herself, and they joust to no conclusion, until Rodomonte reminds Mandricardo that they suspended their battle and are going to help Agramant and that they are wasting time. Hearing of the siege, Marfisa offers to join them.

Ruggiero figures out where Rodomonte and Mandricardo must be, sends Hippalca back to Montalban, and goes after Frontino himself. He gives Hippalca the letter he wrote to Bradamante and additional oral messages and then hastens after the Saracen, whom he overtakes at the fountain. Ruggiero challenges Rodomonte, but, having given his word to Mandricardo, Rodomonte is forced to decline. He invites Ruggiero to join them to relieve the siege of Agramant by Charlemagne and promises that they will fight afterward. Ruggiero asks for the horse, then, and while they are discussing this Mandricardo comes up and has his own cause of argument, for he sees Ruggiero's device of the regal bird.

99 But Ruggiero's ancestry, as we know, goes back to Hector. He can bear it for it is Hector's eagle, and therefore he, as his descendant, has the right to wear it. Even Mandricardo might agree if he knew this, but he doesn't, and to share it seems to him demeaning. He does not pause for talk of the fine points of heraldry's laws.

100 He earned it long ago in Syria where the grateful fairy gave him the armor that Vulcan had made for Hector. Beyond compare, it is the finest in the world and not to be mocked this way! It is absurd to share an ensign of honor he believes he got by deeds of valor. (These two have met before, but I won't repeat that story or be a bore.)

- 101 After that, they'd never met again
until this juncture, where Mandricardo saw
that extremely irksome device on the shield, and then
he called out to Ruggiero either to draw
his sword or ready his lance. "I remember when
I said this to you before. It's the last straw!
We shall conclude the business now and one
will wear that eagle and live in the light of the sun.
- 102 "That other time, I had regard for you,
but my patience is at an end, and neither threat
nor gentler exhortation can seem to do
anything to persuade you. It's time to get
serious about this, for in my view
this is not a matter that I can let
pass by. It would have been better, I'm afraid,
if you had listened to me then and obeyed."
- 103 As dry tinder blazes hot with a small
breath, so Ruggiero's anger caught
fire. "You do not impress me," he said, "at all.
You think because this man needs to be taught
a lesson that you can take part in our brawl
with little risk? Many times I have fought
with better than you two and I can force
you to give me the shield and him the horse.
- 104 "That other time, I restrained myself and did
not kill you because you did not have a sword,
and etiquette and honor both forbid
such an uneven battle. The balance restored,
we now exchange evenly, *pro quo, quid*.
That bird is my family symbol by common accord,
and I wear it rightly. For your false pretense
you will make answer now, and at great expense."

105 “Au contraire,” Mandricardo replied
and he drew his sword—that Orlando, a while ago,
had thrown away. He wore it now at his side.
Ruggiero, who was punctilious, as we know,
discarded his lance for honor as well as pride,
and gripped Balisarda, his good sword, to go
at Mandricardo, but Rodomonte spurred
his horse to intercede. This was absurd!

106 He and Marfisa both object. This is
the second time that Mandricardo has broken
the pact he’d made. Is it the case that his
word is worthless, forgotten as soon as spoken?
He jousted not once but several times in this
effort to take Marfisa. And now this token,
the eagles on their shields, distracts him from
the plight of Agramant, who’d asked them to come.

107 “If you are going to fight, then fight with me,”
Rodomonte said, “for we were already engaged
on a more important dispute, as I think you’d agree.
You are, I’m afraid, too easily enraged
while Agramant is in need. But let that be.
Our quarrel is altogether un-assuaged.
Before you fight with Ruggiero, whom
you’ve only just encountered, let us resume.”

108–137 *There are insults back and forth and, although Marfisa tries to postpone the quarrel, Ruggiero attacks Rodomonte to try to get his horse. Mandricardo strikes Ruggiero on the helmet, almost knocking him out. Ruggiero drops his sword and the reins of his horse and the horse bolts, carrying Ruggiero away. Marfisa strikes Mandricardo on the head with her sword. Rodomonte goes after Ruggiero to finish him off. Ricciardetto and Viviano interpose themselves to protect Ruggiero. Vivi-*

ano hands his sword to Ruggiero, who has now recovered his senses. Discord and Pride, seeing these quarrels, decide that their work is done and they can return to the monastery. Everyone is hacking and slashing at everyone else until Malagigi casts a spell on Doralice's palfrey, making it jump up into the air and then bolt. Rodomonte and Mandricardo take off to save her. Ruggiero and Marfisa go after them, figuring that they are heading for Paris.

[Cantos XXVII and XXVIII omitted]

Canto Ventessimonono

- 1–7 Rodomonte falls instantly in love with Isabella and, frustrated by the hermit's interposition, picks him up and flings him into the sea.
- 8 Having disposed of the talkative hermit, the cruel Rodomonte turned to the trembling, sad lady beside him and at once, as you'll not be surprised to learn, began the ad lib of lovers it's easy to ridicule but sometimes can be sincere. The life he'd had up until now was meaningless, and she was all he wanted or hoped for. E. T. C.
- 9 Her gentle look softened his fierce demeanor, constraining him and influencing his approach. His lust could not have been any keener, but he wanted her sweetness as a gift that is freely given. He was no libertine or violator of women—or anyway this was not how he thought of himself. He'd rather get her by sweet persuasion which would be much better.

- 10 She, on the other hand, was a little mouse
caught in the sharp claws of a cruel cat
with nowhere she could run to hide in the house.
Better to be surrounded by fire that
doesn't enjoy your torments than to arouse
the lust of this human beast! She wondered what
she could possibly do, for she was averse
to the fate that is, compared to death, much worse.
- 11 She resolves to kill herself rather than give
her body and her honor to this disgusting
barbarian for whom no expletive
could be sufficient. For his unwelcome lusting
for her, death surely would be curative.
Zerbino had just died and had been trusting
in the promise she had made to him that she
would live a life of prayer and chastity.
- 12 But how can she bring this about? He is quite strong
and can overcome her easily. She decides
that she must outwit him somehow—wit is her long
suit here. This resolve, of course, she hides,
which isn't difficult. She'll do a song
and dance to beguile him, for honor's sake and pride's.
It is a difficult and dangerous game
she's playing but it earns her immortal fame.
- 13 To the Saracen brute who is coming on to her
in crude and altogether objectionable ways,
she says, "I have a thing that you might prefer
to my poor body, useful in your forays.
I'll give it to you, a present, as it were,
if you would please desist in these essays.
Would you not trade a moment's pleasure for
something that lasts and will make you strong in war?"

- 14 “You can find a thousand women to please
your taste better than I do, but where can there be
the chance to have this gift I can give that frees
one who has it from vulnerability,
which is, in event of any hostilities,
a considerable advantage, as you can see.
Think for a moment of the offer I have made
and consider if it not be an excellent trade.
- 15 “There is an herb—I saw one not far away,
and know where to find it—that, when you prepare it right,
boiled together with ivy and rue (and they say
the fire must be of cypress wood) with the slight
requirement that the hands of a maiden may
squeeze out the essence—can give to any knight
the ability to withstand, as I am sure you’d desire,
any assault by sword, spear point, or fire.
- 16 “If you bathe in it three times it has this effect
that lasts for a month, which isn’t very long,
but you can do it again and again, I expect,
to renew its powers, preserve them, and keep them strong.
To make this essence, I know the correct
recipe and can show you. Unless I’m wrong,
this will be better for you than any throne.
It’s yours if you promise that you will leave me alone.”
- 17 Absolutely. Sure! He promises, swears,
nods, and smiles, and makes the conventional signs
of a solemn undertaking—as if he cares
for truth or honor. But all those lying swines
in Africa yield to him in these affairs,
for his word is utterly worthless and the lines
he spins are famous for their irrelevance to
what he may think or be about to do.

- 18 Isabella nevertheless appears
to take him at his word, and seems to believe
that he will respect her chastity so that her fears
of violation are baseless. Would he deceive
a defenseless maiden, pouring lies in her ears?
And will she later on have cause to grieve?
He promises her that she will not be molested
(at least until the decoction is made and tested).
- 19 How splendid, he thinks, to be like Achilles or
Clytemnestra, Neptune's son, and laugh at blows
that enemies may try to inflict and ignore
their valor and strength! Isabella goes
into the woods to prospect and explore,
gathering leaves and roots and heaven knows
what else. She wanders very far and wide,
and the Saracen is always by her side.
- 20 They spend the entire day getting all these
strange things together, and then they make their way
back to spend the night with the recipe's
requirements, boiling, baking, or grinding. They
work hard for hours to achieve the alchemy's
promised results—or she does. He doesn't stay
involved through it all, but he watches her so he
can reproduce it without uncertainty.
- 21 But the blazing fire she needs in order to cook
the herbs and roots makes Rodomonte hot
and thirsty. And they have taken recently—look,
there they are!—kegs of wine that have not
even been opened. The Arabs' holy book
forbids it, but he and all his men have got
to cool off somehow, and it has a lovely taste.
Not to drink it would be a terrible waste.

- 22 But none of them is used to alcohol
because it is forbidden. It can go to your head
if you have had no experience at all
with wine or beer (or it is limited).
They soon become woozy, teeter, almost fall,
laugh for a while at this, but, then, instead,
they start to sing which probably would be
less annoying if they could stay in key.
- 23 Meanwhile the lady takes the cauldron off
the fire and says to Rodomonte that she
will prove that the mixture works. He should not scoff,
for she will try it herself and prove it to be
exactly what she has claimed. A half carafe
will show that she is invulnerable and he,
although he may doubt, will have to realize
the truth of what he sees with his own eyes.
- 24 She will pour it into a tub in which she will
bathe herself from head to toe, and then
to make sure she has covered herself will spill
more on her head and neck and bosom. And when
that is done, Rodomonte must try to kill
or even wound her, hacking again and again,
with all his strength and with his sharpest blade
and she will stand there and be not at all afraid.
- 25 Yes, of course, it's a ludicrous suggestion
that might well rouse some affable guffaws
among any sensible people, but the question
is blurrier for our Rodomonte because
he is sloshed with all that wine his digestion
is not accustomed to. With hardly a pause
after she's bathed, he takes his sword and with one
stroke he cuts her head off. (What has he done?)

- 26 He's allowed her to escape, that's what. He has abetted her suicide, as she had planned all along. She knew that her strength was no match for his, but on the other hand she was a lot smarter than he, and as that was the case, she made up her grand cock-and-bull story of the strange elixir and thus turned him into her problem-fixer.
- 27 Her severed head, as it rolled across the floor, was clearly heard to speak, and what it said sounded very like "Zerbino" for whom she had kept herself chaste and pure. Instead of living in dishonor, she cared more for him whom she still loved, though he was dead. Now they were joined together. Go in peace dear lady, and may your fame forever increase.
- 28 God looked down from Heaven then to commend such sacrifice, even greater than that of Lucrece, and he decided therefore that he would send special blessings to every one of these women who bear her name and who defend their honor. Learned poets will never cease their praises of Isabellas that will live on echoing on Parnassus and Helicon.
- 29 So God spoke and even swore by the Styx as the chaste young lady's soul in grace ascended to rejoin her Zerbino where spirits mix in a radiance that is absolutely splendid. Below on earth, in a disgraceful fix, Rodomonte was heartbroken at having offended Isabella's spirit. He decided to make the chapel into a sepulcher for her sake.

- 30 What is involved, you ask, in this transformation?
He brings in workmen from palaces all around
(either through love, or greed, or trepidation)
and gathering large rocks that they have found
they build a tower—a conservative estimation
would put it at ninety cubits from the ground
to the very top. It encloses the entire
chapel, even including its little spire.
- 31 It rather resembled the tower Hadrian built
on the banks of the Tiber. Inside it were the two
lovers together (after their blood had been spilt).
He also put up a bridge that anyone who
crossed the river would use, and in his guilt
he put no railings or parapets on it. His true
purpose was to challenge any knight
who wanted to get across and make them fight.
- 32 The bridge was much too narrow to allow
two horses to stand side by side. One would fall
a very great distance down to the water below,
or else he'd have to yield and give up all
his armor as a trophy which would go
into that gloomy chapel to hang on the wall.
And Rodomonte made no distinction here
between the Christian and pagan knights, I fear.
- 33 It was a peculiar tribute to her, but he
was a less than refined fellow and his taste
and inclination ran this way, you see.
He risked his life with every knight he faced,
and that was the only value or quality
he could recognize: each time he placed
another one of these things on the wall he could
imagine that Isabella's ghost understood.

- 34 The work on the bridge was finished quickly—in ten days or so, a remarkable thing indeed. The tower took rather longer but it had been a very ambitious project. Still, with all speed, they raised it higher each day. (His discipline was very strict.) It grew, as they say, like a weed. And from the top a sentinel could warn of anyone's approach with a blast of his horn.
- 35 Having armed himself, Rodomonte would go to the side of the bridge the other one was seeking. The bridge itself was the jousting field, and so if either swerved he'd fall to his death, shrieking. It was a terrible way to confront a foe, beyond dangerous, even crazy—bespeaking Rodomonte's self-hatred. He might well fall but that didn't seem to worry him at all.
- 36 The water, he thought, could wash his sins away and even cleanse his soul before it went to the judgment that each of us must face one day. And although I cannot be a hundred percent certain of this, there are a few who say that a death by drowning absolves the penitent of the sins that come from drinking too much wine. This could have been a part of his design.
- 37 It's said that if you build it, they will come, and so it was, perhaps because this route was the fastest way to get both to and from Italy and Spain. But in pursuit of glory or honor, there were also some for whom the encounter was an absolute *acte gratuit*. The danger itself was the flame that drew them and their only cause.

- 38 But rather than gaining honor they had to leave
their arms for Rodomonte's decoration
of the lovers' tomb he'd made, and I believe
many failed in their averruncation
of Rodomonte's assaults and they would achieve
nothing more than the early termination
of lives they could have enjoyed or put to use.
(Or maybe not, and that was their excuse.)
- 39 Those who survived, if they were Saracens,
he spared and only took their arms but let
them then go free. The Christian experience
was harsher, for he kept them captive to get
ransoms, or he'd make them slaves and hence
profit by them. The operation was yet
a work in progress when who should happen along
but the mad Orlando, the hero of our song?
- 40 Crazy, perhaps, but he is able to see
that there is a river and there is a bridge also.
There happens to be a barrier, too, but he
ignores it, for he goes where he wants to go
without anyone's permission, insanely free.
Rodomonte, however, calls out to him, "No!
You cannot cross here!" He is rash and proud
and it strikes Orlando that he is very loud.
- 41 Orlando is crossing the bridge (after all, why not?)
and Rodomonte is shouting that it is for
noblemen and knights (the people who've got
trophies he can hang up). Does he ignore
the warning? Or is he deaf? Never mind what
the story is, Rodomonte needs no more
provocation from this disobedient clown.
He'll meet him, fight him, beat him, and throw him down.

42 He has no idea of course who this man might be
and does not expect that he will be much of a fighter.
He does not look formidable for he
is going about in the nude. It would be politer
to put on pants, perhaps, but courtesy
seems not to weigh much with him. He's either tight or
out of his mind. The cold water below
may shock him into his senses. You never know!

43 The two of them start to fight, but just at this
moment, who should come along but a young
woman of gentle face who clearly is
of noble bearing? You'll recall that I've sung
of her before: she is none other than Miss
Fiordiligi who's wandering among
the various places where Brandimart might be.
(He is the lady's lover, don't you see?)

44 She looks out at the bridge and sees the two
grappling with each other, and her eyes
focus a bit more sharply. Is that who
she thinks it is? What an enormous surprise!
And why on earth is he naked? In a few
seconds this all crosses her mind. She tries
to figure it out. But that it's Orlando she
is sure—never mind the fact of his nudity.

45 She stops, of course, to watch this demonstration
of strength as each attempts to throw the other
off the bridge and down to the mutilation
such a great fall will entail. It starts to bother
the pagan that it requires the application
of all his strength so that the lunatic rather
than he should be thrown over. He writhes and twists
and grapples and strikes the madman with his fists.

- 46 Rodomonte tries various grips and moves his feet in whatever ways he thinks may bring him some advantage, but every effort proves useless against Orlando. The Saracen's thing is in the end brute force, but it behooves a fighter to use some strategy as he clings to an opponent even stronger than he. He could be a bear wrestling with a tree.
- 47 Orlando on the other hand is not thinking clearly, but his instincts are working and his strength is such that few other men have got as much. He may be out of his mind but is formidable. He has the big pagan caught in his arms in a kind of full nelson grip and this is extremely hard to break. It is a tether that binds as, over the edge, they fall together.
- 48 Only when they hit the water do they separate, and Orlando, being nude, swims like a fish. But the armor tends to weigh Rodomonte down somewhat as you'd expect. The former emerges, *déshabillé* perhaps, but he is quite refreshed and, renewed, he runs away. Meanwhile, the armored Moor has some trouble struggling to shore.
- 49 In the meanwhile, Fiordiligi, having seen this spectacle, now crosses the bridge to search for evidence of Brandimart. Has he been anywhere near here? Nowhere in the church with all the other shields that hang between the windows does she see his. But let us lurch our narrative back to Orlando, reciting facts about that afflicted paladin's manic acts.

- 50 Or some of them anyway. It would be mad
to try to list each one, there were so many.
But from that dismaying profusion, a chiliad
of bizarre events, we'll choose a few—as when he
was in the Pyrenees. It was both sad
but also quite amusing, if you have any
taste for extravagant absurdity
of the kind he showed (or you are at all like me).
- 51 So he's down somewhere near the border of Spain and France
and he's heading in a general way to the west.
He gets to a narrow passage where by chance
there are a couple of woodmen back from their quest
for firewood, and they see that he's got no pants
and looks quite mad. Brusquely they suggest
that he get out of their way. He's blocking the road
for them and for their donkey and its load.
- 52 He's naked, he's crazy, his eyes are rolling, but
he's still Orlando after all, and he
deserves a little respect from these fellows. What
are they thinking, treating him so uncivilly?
He does not deign to speak, but with his mouth shut
he gives them an answer as clear as clear can be,
kicking the donkey in the chest to send
it high in the air where it sails end over end.
- 53 At its apogee it looked like a little bird
soaring above the earth, although very few
birds carry loads of wood. (It is an absurd
idea, but there it was in the sky, and you
would surely have been impressed as this occurred.)
Eventually—only after the donkey flew
about a mile—it landed on the top
of a little hill where it came at last to a stop.

- 54 He turned then to the two young louts and they were both in a panic. One was lucky and threw himself down over the cliff, which fell away quite sharply, but there was a branch that he clung to maybe sixty feet down, where he could sway in terror but alive and with a view of the valley that stretched below him. It was a great vista he did not quite appreciate.
- 55 The other one climbs upward hoping to flee the madman and find some place where he can hide. Orlando, however, grabs his feet and he pulls him back down and stretches his legs so wide and with such superhuman energy so firmly and so suddenly applied that he rips him in two pieces, as one might split a chicken he had taken off the spit.
- 56 Or, no, that's too domestic, too refined. It was far worse than that as he ripped apart the insolent boy. What rather comes to mind is when a falconer pulls the beating heart out of a heron to show his bird what kind of goodies there are in the world so it will start to hunt on its own. Meanwhile, the boy who hung on the branch crawled back to the cliff to which it clung.
- 57 Miraculously, he survived to speak of what had happened to them. Our Turpin heard of his account and wrote of it—if you seek authority for this, you have the word of that Archbishop. (I would never sneak fictions into this narrative but have referred to the best and most trustworthy accounts that I can find. Do I exaggerate? That, I deny!)

- 58 This and many other wonderful things
he did on the way to the Spanish seashore, most
of which were also nutty. His wandering brings
him to a beach in Tarragona—the coast
is very attractive—where gentle murmurings
of the breaking waves are soothing to diagnosed
lunatics. He decides to settle there
and lie on the sand and breathe the salt sea air.
- 59 And what do you think now happens? The long arm
of coincidence can reach as far in the real
world as in poems, either for good or harm
(or just for ironic twists, I often feel).
At any rate, who comes onto this warm
and inviting spot? I'm happy to reveal
that it's Angelica who is passing through
to Cathay, and of course Medoro, too.
- 60 She doesn't recognize him, for his hair
is a nimbus that covers much of his face. His skin
from all that sun is dark brown everywhere.
His eyes are hidden and his face is thin.
A wild man out of Libya, one would swear.
A filthy, tangled beard hangs from his chin.
How would she distinguish this apparition
reduced as he was to such a distressing condition?
- 61 Angelica is terrified and shrieks
in fear and disgust. She turns to her husband, who
comes to protect her of course against such freaks
as this. Crazy Orlando does not do
anything very menacing, but he seeks
comfort from this gentle person to
whom he looks for solace. He is blind
as to who she is, but then he is out of his mind.

- 62 He follows her as a dog will try to pursue
a deer or a rabbit. Medoro, seeing this,
hardly has to consider what he must do,
and runs after him to strike with a sword at his
back. The blow is well aimed and ought to
have cut his head off, but as we remember, he is
enchanted with impervious skin and bone—
but Medoro did not know what we have known.
- 63 Orlando feels it, though, and turns around
as if to swat away an annoying fly.
He punches Medoro's horse. It falls to the ground
instantly, dead as a stone. But Orlando's eye
is on her whom he chases (like that hound).
She's fleeing in stark terror as you or I
would surely do with spurs and riding crop
but it is as if she'd come to a dead stop.
- 64 Orlando is getting closer and closer. She
remembers the ring. (As you do, too, I hope.)
She takes it from her finger and as we
expect puts it into her mouth to cope
with the moment's exigencies conveniently.
And she disappears. Poof, like a bubble of soap
that is there one moment, shining in the air,
and vanishes in an instant as we stare.
- 65 But it isn't a perfect maneuver, for her steed
stumbles just then, or maybe in the transfer
she loses her balance enough so, at that speed,
she falls out of the saddle and suddenly her
body is stretched out on the sand. Indeed,
it is only by a hair's breadth, as it were,
that she doesn't get trampled by the maniac
who had been gaining speed and was at her back.

- 66 Up to a point she's lucky but she will never see that mare again. She'll have to steal another one or acquire one however she can. And her sense of loss is very real. But we aren't trying to seem excessively clever when we say that she was fortunate to feel at all. The mare runs down the beach, but after her comes Orlando with peals of loony laughter.
- 67 Let us not worry for her sake but turn our eyes to our eponymous cuckoo whose fury does not abate with Angela's disappearance. He tries instead for the horse and very soon in his hot pursuit he catches the mare. (He really flies!) He grabs her mane and then her reins so that he has her under his control. She slows and then at last she stops. And up he goes.
- 68 He doesn't just get up but he mounts from behind, jumping up to land in the saddle and then takes off at once, as if to outrace the wind, and he never stops or slows down, not even when the horse is exhausted. He isn't being unkind, he just doesn't notice or pay attention when the horse wants to stop and take a drink or graze. He is oblivious to this because he is crazy.
- 69 Trying to jump a ditch the horse goes down and there they are at the bottom, topsy-turvy. Neither is injured, it seems, but with a frown of anger that the horse does not deserve he realizes he cannot turn her around or lead her up. Using whatever reserve he has of his mad strength he lifts her upon his shoulders and carries her up. (It takes some brawn.)

- 70 After a short time the enormous weight
of the horse makes an impression. He may be nuts,
but this is a burden he didn't anticipate,
and it might be better to let her walk. He puts
her down on the ground again which is a great
relief. He tugs on the rein but finds that cuts
no ice with her (as they say). She barely moves.
He ties the rein to her hind leg, which improves
- 71 her speed a little bit. Orlando drags
her after him, encouraging her to
step lively, but the exhausted animal flags
and has reached the very limit of what she can do.
She trips on rocks and on thorn bushes, snags,
and is as sad a wreck as you'll ever view.
At length, she drops and dies, but he does not
notice. He keeps on going at a trot.
- 72 What makes this strange is that he drags a dead
horse behind him. Now and then he'll pause
to plunder a farm here or some homestead
there. Hunger has, after all, its laws,
and he needs fruit or meat or a loaf of bread
that he can cram in his very powerful jaws.
The farmers or the householders he may
ignore or, if they are a nuisance, slay.
- 73 Had Angelica not popped the magic ring
into her mouth, he'd probably have done
to her exactly the same loony thing
as he did to the horse. Oh, cursed be the one
who gave it to her (Ruggiero, if I may bring
his name to mind). Otherwise, the fun
of vengeance for all faithless women would
have been Orlando's. Get it? Got it? Good!

- 74 And not just she alone, but womankind
in general, had they been in Orlando's power,
he would have punished. In or out of his mind,
he was right about their ingratitude for our
many services. Unless you're blind
you see this often enough so it can sour
your outlook, but my throat is tight and my harp
needs tuning. We'll resume when I am sharp.

Canto Trentesimo

- 1–3 *Ariosto asks to be excused for speaking harshly of Angelica in particular and of women in general.*

- 4 I say stupid things sometimes and am in as sad
case as Orlando nearly, but with less excuse
than he had, wandering Spain, utterly mad
and dragging a dead horse behind him, the use
of which escapes me, but as we know he had
a distorted frame of mind and different views.
He came at last to the mouth of a river where
he had no choice except to leave her there.
- 5 He could swim like a beaver and he jumped in to come
out on the other bank where he chanced to meet
a shepherd riding a horse. Separated from
his own mount, Count Orlando deigned to greet
and offer the youth a trade—which may sound dumb
to us, but he thought fair on a balance sheet.
The shepherd would give him the pony he rode and he
would give, in exchange, his mare back there by the sea.

- 6 “I can show her to you from here,” he said with a smile,
“for she’s just across the river, lying dead,
but that is her only defect, my lad, and I’ll
expect you can have her cured of that,” he said,
expecting no disagreement or denial.
“If you’d get off, I could get on instead
and take your pony with me, for he is pleasing.”
The shepherd supposed that Orlando had to be teasing.
- 7 He continued toward the stream, but the other one
called, “What are you, deaf? I want your horse!”
The shepherd had had enough of this stupid fun
and he took a cudgel to the madman (force
is often clearer than words). He did not stun
Orlando but he enraged him, and of course
the count retaliated and with one blow
of his fist he killed the unlucky shepherd. (Oh!)
- 8 He mounts the pony and rides away on roads
that lead him here and there, and as he goes
he plunders many travelers, takes their loads
of treasure or just food—but he never slows
to let his horse eat or drink. These episodes
are distressing for me to have to recount, God knows.
His theory, I’m sorry to say, is that there’d be many
horses to take whenever he wanted any.
- 9 This often meant that he had to kill those who
had owned these beasts. They never seemed to object,
but then the dead very seldom argue with you,
and Orlando could assume that all was correct.
He went to Malaga next where he could do
astonishing damage. There the paladin wrecked
houses and many more buildings, and he slew
a number so great you wouldn’t believe it was true.

- 10 He progressed from Malaga to another town
called Zibeltarro, or, if you prefer,
Gibraltar (people use both names). And down
on the sea he saw a boat casting off. There were
people out for a pleasant time, not bound
for anywhere special. What could be lovelier
than to spend a pleasant day sailing the sea
when the water is as gentle as it can be?
- 11 What fun! He wants to go. He calls out, "Wait!"
But if they see or hear him, they do not
stop. A naked madman may be great
fun at certain outré parties but
this group's tastes don't run that way. The mate
adjusts the sail to increase their speed a knot
or two. Orlando, furious of course,
follows after them—he's still on his horse.
- 12 The horse is not happy about this, but he goes
into the ocean, knee-deep, belly-deep, then
there's very little left except his nose
sticking out of the water. Again and again
he tries to turn back, but his rider rains down blows
to keep him pointed south. Have any men
ever ridden a horse across that strait?
I shouldn't think their numbers would be great.
- 13 The desperate horse is doing its very best,
but the boat makes even better speed and Orlando
loses sight of it, as you might have guessed.
There is only so much the wretched animal can do.
Full of water, it gives in to the crest
of a not very large wave and then, *lento*,
sinks to the bottom, perhaps there to join forces
in another life with the herds of small sea horses.

- 14 Orlando would have drowned as well, but he was a very proficient swimmer and could propel himself with kind of side-stroke across the sea. The current was not very strong and the gentle swell buoyed him up quite nicely—otherwise we would be composing a sad song of farewell. But he came out all right. One of heaven's tricks is to take good care of drunks and lunatics.
- 15 He swam ashore at Ceuta, opposite Gibraltar on the African shore, and he started running eastward. (What was it that made him hurry? It beats the hell out of me.) He came to a soldiers' bivouac that was lit by many campfires by which he could see an enormous army made up of just blacks—an occasion for another of his attacks.
- 16–95 *Doralice having decided the quarrel between Mandricardo and Rodomonte, Ruggiero and Mandricardo meet in the lists in a fearful battle. Both fall to the ground, and it is supposed that Mandricardo is the victor. But when the crowd rushes to the lists they find that he is dead and Ruggiero is only wounded. The cheers of the crowd give little pleasure to the hero, however, who must lie on a sick-bed instead of seeking Bradamante, according to his promise.*

[Cantos XXXI, XXXII, and XXXIII omitted]

Canto Trentesimoquarto

- 1–39 *Leaving Bradamante in a forest, Astolfo flies on the hippogryph over the kingdoms of the world—Aragon, Navarre, Cadiz, Egypt, Morocco, Fez—and over the desert until he reaches the kingdom of Nubia, whose king he rescues from the harpies using his magic horn. He chases*

them to the gate of Hell and follows them into Hades. There he hears the shade of Lydia tell her story about how pitiless and ungrateful she was to her faithful lover, Alceste. Rejected by the king as an unworthy husband for his daughter, Alceste goes to the king of Armenia and offers to help him invade Lydia. They besiege Lydia, and its king is in desperate straits. He sends his daughter to offer herself to Alceste if the siege is lifted. Alceste does not touch Lydia but he changes sides, kills the king of Armenia, conquers Armenia as well as Cappadocia and Hyrcania, and then comes back to claim Lydia as his bride. Lydia and her father, however, have decided to betray him and they send him on further errands, Herculean labors involving combats with giants and monsters. He comes back from these tasks alive, which was not Lydia's intention. She is speaking:

40 “Unable to kill him that way, I changed my plan
to something even more sinister, and I sent
him off to do great damage to every man
who'd supported him or was his friend. He went
without any objection rather than
risk offending me—although I meant
to do him harm and get rid of him forever.
He was brave and loving but not especially clever.

41 “Eventually, there came a time when I
had no more enemies of mine for him
to deal with—or any friends of his. And why
not tell him the truth then? He was dim,
but if I was quite blunt, then by and by
he'd finally get some vague idea of the grim
situation—that I hated him and my hope
had been that he would die, the pathetic dope.

42 “I couldn't kill him myself, for I would be
called cruel by all the world that understood
how much I owed him. Instead, I said that he
should keep away from me and that he should

never again either see or hear from me.
I said this as matter-of-factly as I could,
but it wasn't the manner that he found bothersome
but the matter, which wounded him and struck him dumb.

- 43 “He asked at last for mercy and I refused
and then he went away and he fell ill,
took to his bed, and languished, not merely bruised
but mortally wounded by what I'd said—until
he died, I'm sorry to say. And I'm not excused
but I suffer here in this black smoke and will
through all eternity, for we who dwell
here know that there's no pardon for us in Hell.”
- 44 Lydia falls silent, and the Duke goes on
to investigate further, but the smoke grows more
dense and acrid and, after he has gone
only a few steps, he turns back for
the light and air that we depend upon.
He finds his curiosity to explore
has given way to a wish to take a breath
and avoid, if he can, a most unpleasant death.
- 45 He does not walk or trot but runs as fast
as he can go to the entrance of the cave
where the smoke is much less thick and dark, and at last
he emerges back into the world—for brave
sometimes must yield to prudent. When he has passed
the threshold and emerged from the living grave,
he takes a gulp of air and turns around
to stare with awe at that gaping hole in the ground.
- 46 But to keep those harpies captive there, he cuts
many trees, such as pepper and cardamon,
and piles them up with the heavy stones he puts
to block their egress so that when he is gone,

they cannot follow him out again. He shuts
them in, he hopes forever. When he is done
he moves away quickly and eagerly in pursuit
of water to wash himself, for he's covered with soot.

47 He is filthy dirty, not only his outer clothes,
but his skin as well. There's a ghastly ashen cast
to his whole body, even inside his nose
where he breathed in all that acrid smoke, but at last
he finds a spring gushing up from a rock, one of those
that painters like. He strips off his clothing fast
and bathes himself from head to toe in delight
and relief, and his color slowly returns to white.

48 Then he mounts his hippogryph to fly
to that highest mountain peak that is thought to be
close to the moon's orbit. One may guess why,
for having been in the depths so recently,
he yearns for whatever is opposite, high in the sky.
At any rate, he ascends continually
until he reaches the acme, the apex, the peak.
(It's the highest point of the mountain of which I speak.)

49 You can hardly imagine what it is like up there
with flowers that look like emeralds and sapphires,
diamonds and pearls that glint as the gentle air
tousles them in the shimmer of our desires.
The leaves are lovely too, and all the rare
fruits and blossoms. It is a scene that inspires
our dreams of a better place and a better life
free from the ugliness of our constant strife.

50 Little iridescent songbirds twitter
among the branches as crystal streams flow by.
The caress of the breezes there is never bitter
but always gentle as nature's delighted sigh.

It ruffles the pond's surface to make it glitter
in the endless sunlight to gratify the eye.
One might suppose that all the world's water dreams
of flowing in such happy, privileged streams.

51 All around there was a sweetness to
the air as herbs and leaves and blossoms lent
their essences and attars as in the brew
of some expensive parfumeur's best scent,
so different from the stinking world that you
and I live in, unpleasantly redolent.
In the midst of all this splendor was the site
of a looming castle, unbelievably bright.

52 Astolfo swoops around it, and his best guess
is that its circumference must be thirty miles
at the very least—of utter lavishness.
It seems like a refuge from all our mortal trials,
a place in which our suffering and duress
would have no place, but only gentle smiles
that come from the contemplation of the good
would be appropriate in its neighborhood.

53 As he comes closer he sees that every wall
gleams like a gem, or even more impressive
is that the building seems to be carved in all
its grandeur from a single jewel. Excessive?
Or a demonstration, rather, of how small
our notions are of splendor and the possessive
joys we take in wealth—the famous seven
wonders of the world seem tame in heaven.

54 He enters and in the vestibule he sees
an old man with a red mantle and white
gown, but very vivid they are, for these
are cinnabar and milk and dazzle the sight.

His beard is silver (and almost to his knees)
as is his hair. An aureole of light
surrounds him, as it does in paintings of
the saintly figures who dwell in heaven above.

55 The aged man welcomes the duke with speech
of gentleness and wisdom, saying that he
could never on his own have ascended to reach
this terrestrial paradise: it must be
the will of heaven to bring him here to teach
his soul the secret of his destiny.
“It is not your wingèd horse or even your fine
horn that brought you here, but the Lord’s design.

56 “Your task, which I am happy to explain
to you, is a great undertaking that we
care about—to rescue Charlemagne,
for the Holy Faith itself is in jeopardy.
It is a weighty business here in train,
and I am here to advise you how to be
effective in this enterprise. But first
let us attend to your hunger and your thirst.”

57 The old man leads him through long corridors
past splendid rooms to which the duke pays no
attention for it is the name of the man that floors
Astolfo—this is John who, as we know,
wrote one of the gospels and through doors
is leading his guest and showing him where to go.
The evangelist himself is Astolfo’s host,
and this is what astonishes him the most.

58 He is the one of whom it was said that he
would not have to end his years with death—for the Son
of God told Peter, “If he waits for me
till I return, what is it to you?”—which one

could take at least to imply immortality.
So he was taken up alive as none
has been but Elijah and Enoch, neither of whom
had to spend any time enclosed in a tomb.

59 Those were his companions there and they
enjoy an eternal springtime as they await
the angelic trumpets that signal that the day
of Christ's return has come upon the great
cloud Revelation speaks of. Far away
is the pestilence of the evil airs our fate
condemns us to. Instead, these holies dwell
in miraculous precincts where they live quite well.

60 They put Astolfo into a pleasant room
and sent his hippogryph to a grand stable
to be looked after by an attentive groom.
At meals there was a splendid array on the table
of the luscious fruits of paradise that loom
so large in human history. And he was able
to understand how great the temptation had been
with these succulent occasions for Eve's sin.

61 Good food and a nice long sleep in a comfy bed
are, as we know, quite heavenly, and he
enjoyed these blessings fully. When the red
rays of Aurora signaled the world that she
had arisen from her couch at last and sped
into the skies, the duke arose—to see
the disciple Jesus loved standing right there,
his graceful hand grazing the back of a chair.

62 St. John began to tell the paladin
what had been going on of late in France,
the trouble the church and the empire were in,
and Orlando's very unfortunate circumstance,

a punishment from God for having been neglectful of his duties—and not by chance, for the Lord punishes those the most severely whom he has trusted and whom he has loved most dearly.

- 63 “God gave Orlando when he was born the great gifts of strength and invulnerability so that steel could never wound him, for his fate was to defend the Holy Faith, and he was ordained as Samson was—to decimate the Philistines. But then when necessity was greatest and Orlando was needed most, he fell in love with a pagan and left his post.
- 64 “So blinded was he that he even fought with his cousin Rinaldo (the story of this is in *Orlando Innamorato*, which you ought to read one of these days) and lately his demeanor has grown pitiless. He is caught in the snares of passion. His punishment for this is that God has driven him crazy so that he may wander the world with his backside on display.
- 65 “He takes away his wits so he does not recognize anyone whom he may know or even himself. You’ve studied the Holy Bible a lot and you remember Nebuchadnezzar whom heaven also drove mad. For seven years he forgot he was a human being and he would raven on grass and grain like an ox out in the field until he had served his sentence and could be healed.
- 66 “But the paladin’s sin is much less grave than that of the ancient king and deserves a penalty of much shorter duration. It is not longer than three months, which you will agree

is merciful. And now what you have got
is the duty of obtaining the remedy
by which Orlando's sense may be restored.
This means that you are an instrument of the Lord.

- 67 “What you must do is make a journey with me
abandoning the earth altogether to rise
up to the moon, which, as is plain to see,
is the closest planet to earth—and it supplies
that medicine we need for Orlando to be
brought back to his wits so he can again be wise.
When the moon tonight is directly overhead
we shall follow where faith and fate have led.”
- 68 Of these and other things the apostle spoke
that day, but when the sun sank into the west
and the moon arose a chariot with a yoke
of four horses was readied at his behest
that long ago in Judah Elijah took
as is recorded in the older test-
ament, and by which he was able to fly
miraculously upward into the sky.
- 69 The Evangelist hitched the horses, redder than fire,
seated himself with Astolfo, and took the reins
to drive the steeds into the sky, higher
and higher. This monstrous effort hardly strains
the powerful steeds which one must pause to admire.
There is a ring of fire that remains
to cross through, but the old man so contrives
it that the chariot, quite undamaged, survives.
- 70 Having crossed that fiery sphere they arrive
at the realm of the moon, which looks like a steel plate,
entirely spotless, and about the same size, I've
been told, as the earth—and that would include our great

oceans which add to our globe. After the drive,
which has not taken long I would estimate,
Astolfo expresses his astonishment and surprise
that the moon, which looks small from the earth, is of such size.

- 71 An unexpected revelation is that
the earth is hard to discern, emitting no light
by which to perceive it. From the distance at
which Astolfo is standing the earth is quite
indistinct, its pleasant habitat
not projecting very far into the night.
With difficulty he can get some hint
of where the oceans are—but he has to squint.
- 72 On the moon there are rivers and lakes and hills and dales
like those we have but different. And also towns
with houses and public buildings, but on such scales
as we are not accustomed to. He frowns
in amazement and concentration, for earth pales
in comparison. There are also woods and downs
where nymphs and fauns are hunting fierce moon beasts
and celebrating afterwards with feasts.
- 73 Duke Astolfo does not pause to explore
every feature of the moon. He is
there to transact business which is more
pressing. The Apostle is aware of this
and leads him downward to a valley floor
where all that we have lost or has gone amiss
through Time or Fortune or our own grievous fault
is collected and stored as if in a huge vault.
- 74 I do not speak only of realms and gold
that Fortune's unstable wheel gives or takes back,
but also those things beyond what she can hold
or give—Fame, for example, which the attack

of Time can devour before it has grown old.
Up there as well are countless prayers our slack
belief has offered up, and vows that were broken
very nearly as soon as they were spoken.

- 75 Ah, and the tears and sighs of lovers, the hours
that gamblers lose and ignorant men waste,
the plans we make that are well within our powers
but require perseverance if not haste
before they fade away. And books of ours
that we intended to study rather than taste.
Those can often be heavier losses than
material things in the life of any man.
- 76 The paladin asks his holy guide to explain
now this, now that as they pass along. He sees
a pile of tumid bladders that seem to restrain
much tumult and shouting. What on the moon could these
possibly be? The fragments that remain
of the crowns of ancient Assyria, if you please,
and Lydia and Persia and of Greece,
famous once, but even such fame can cease.
- 77 Next he sees a pile of hooks of gold
and silver. These turn out, of course, to be
gifts made to stingy princes and patrons, bold
invitations for greater rewards, you see.
And the snares in the garlands? He hardly needs to be told
that they are words of the flattery that we
hear all the time. But there are special cases
of flattering verse which now are the carapaces
- 78 of those dead crickets there. The golden chains
and jeweled fetters are loves that did not succeed.
The eagle claws? Threats that one who reigns
makes to his subject courtiers when he may need

something from them. The bellows, he explains,
with the smoke are the promises to a Ganymede,
cosseted and favored and rewarded
(but then, like a faded flower, he is discarded).

79 There are also many ruined cities and ghost
towns in which one still can see much treasure
that someone has hoarded up and somehow lost.
These he is told are conspiracies one can measure
by how badly things turned out, as happens most
of the time. There are snakes with the faces of ladies of pleasure,
which are representations of counterfeiters and thieves
and of card sharps with aces up their sleeves.

80 The heap of overturned soup bowls with the mess
of soup in a pool beneath them? What are they?
The Evangelist says they are charity and noblesse
postponed until after the giver has passed away.
The mountain of flowers that rot and deliquesce?
That's the Donation of Constantine or, say,
the gift he made Pope Sylvester of the City
of Rome. (The way it turned out wasn't pretty.)

81 Those many snares with the bird lime are not so hard
to guess at, for they are women's ensnaring charms,
sweet words and smiles that make us lower our guard
and lure us until we are caught in their white arms.
The rest? It would take too long, verse by the yard,
to list the myriad things that cause the harms
of life on earth. The one thing that it wants
is foolishness which abides in its earthly haunts.

82 Astolfo comes to his own works and days,
things he has said and done but cannot now
recall or even remember the blame or praise
they earned him long ago, only Lord knows how.

Had he been without a guide, his careful gaze
would not have revealed even enough to allow
a guess, for memories seem to change their shape
so that even as we hunt for them they escape.

83 Then the most precious thing, what is so much
ours that we never think to swear by it
in vows we make to God, for it is such
an intimate part of ourselves—I mean our wit,
or sense, or reason. If we have lost touch
with that, we are no longer ourselves, that bit
being what we require to think. It lay
in a mountain-high pile out there on display.

84 It was thin liquid, apt to evaporate,
so it was kept in flasks, some large, some small.
On one of the largest, into which the great
sense of the Lord of Anglant was poured, a small
tag proclaimed: *Orlando's Mind*, to relate
the contents to its owner. And they all
had labels. The noble duke even discerned
much of his own brain, which had been inurned.

85 An interesting question then arose
in Astolfo's mind, or that part of it he still
had: who down on earth can we suppose
has all his wits or, lacking some, may still
think himself totally sane? Nobody knows,
but clearly a lot of our reason is here to fill
these flasks on the moon. We have no idea we're sick
and everyone more or less is a lunatic.

86 Some lose their minds for love and some by seeking
honors or wealth as they wander the earth, while some
fawn on their rulers, or study magic, wreaking
havoc with various elements, or they come

to grief in pursuit of art. But broadly speaking,
it's valuing some one thing more than the sum
of all of life that does it. The ruined mind
of a poet or sophist up there is easy to find.

- 87 Astolfo took his own and had a whiff
and what he'd lost of his sense at once returned.
Invigorated by that little sniff
he lived a long and healthy life as we've learned
from the great Archbishop Turpin of Rheims (as if
we needed a source!). But later on he burned
with love, I'm sorry to say, and lost his heart
and wit as well, or at least a substantial part.
- 88 Orlando's flask, the largest and fullest, he took,
and it was heavier than at first it seemed.
But before they went back the Apostle let him look
at a palace of which the poets have often dreamed.
It stands beside a pleasantly purling brook,
and inside those three old women work who are teamed
together to spin of silk or linen or wool
the lives of men that are ugly or beautiful.
- 89 Lachesis spins out the thread that Clotho brings
and Atropos cuts. Another makes her choices
of what is attractive or not. "What are these things
they're doing?" Astolfo asks the Apostle. (Their voices
are hushed, of course.) "These threads or sturdier strings
are lives, and those are the Fates, and man rejoices
or weeps for what they do. From your first breath
the length of your thread determines your life and death.
- 90 "That fourth who chooses the prettier pieces decides
if you are blessed or damned and what is the kind
of life you'll lead, but whether she follows or guides
is not quite clear. You will, however, find

that Death and Nature obey and Fortune rides
on the work of these women and what they have designed.
Consider those uglier fibers and over here
delicate silks. Which would one hope for? Or fear?"

91 There are nameplates on the skeins—some are of gold
and others of silver or iron—and there are heaps
of these, which an extremely busy old
man picks up and takes somewhere. He keeps
them all in order. His scrawny arms can hold
many of these and he never tires or sleeps.
He just keeps on keeping on, for more and more
in what is surely a very burdensome chore.

92 He does not even walk, but always races
with the skirt of his apron full of these, but who
he is and what he is doing as he chases
around with these things will be revealed to you
soon, I promise. This canto, in any case, is
quite long enough, as I am sure you, too,
have begun to think. We'll take an intermission
and resume again, with your most kind permission.

[Canto XXXV omitted]

Canto Trentesimosesto

1–11 *Ariosto reflects on the differences between ancient chivalry and modern cruelty in warfare. His example of chivalric courtesy is Bradamante, who, when she had unhorsed opponents, would hold their horses for them and help them remount. One of these, Ferrau, she sends to deliver her challenge to Ruggiero.*

- 12 Ruggiero of course accepts this invitation and calls for his armor. As he is getting into the equipment there is conversation about this knight by whom Ferrau had been commissioned. What was known of his reputation? Who indeed was he? “Rinaldo’s kin,” Ferrau replies, “but not, I think, the brother, Ricciardetto. This one is another,
- 13 “probably the sister, who’s just as strong and powerful as Rinaldo.” Ruggiero hears her mentioned and . . . It seems there is something wrong with him. He blushes crimson to his ears. He tries not to show these feelings of his among such company but it nonetheless appears that he is lovesick and can scarcely take an ordinary breath for Bradamante’s sake.
- 14 It is, of course, the dart of love that he feels. It sends a fire through his veins and, at the same time, a frisson we would have to call a chill—such are the pains of the wound that it inflicts quite frequently. Of her love for him he fears that none remains. Should he accept her challenge then? Or sit still, decline, and bear the shame of it?
- 15 So he’s thinking about it, torn, and as he takes his time, Marfisa, who happens to be there—and always wears her armor, remember—makes a play of her own. It would be most unfair if the victory she should have, for goodness’ sakes, were suddenly to vanish into thin air because Ruggiero goes out first. So she will go herself for what glory there may be.

- 16 She leaps on her horse (which is no easy thing with all that metal) and spurs it onto the field where Bradamante waits with fluttering heart for Ruggiero. (Will he yield and become her prisoner so they can cling together forever, their troths plighted and sealed?) But out of the gate Marfisa comes instead, a phoenix on the helmet on her head.
- 17 (Does the emblem signify that she has pride in being unique in the world in strength and power? Or is it that she will never be a bride, much less a lover, and will stay chaste, her flower of maidenhood never plucked?) From the other side Bradamante glares at her and with a sour smile she asks her title and her name. Marfisa replies. Her smile is just the same.
- 18 Marfisa? This is the one who, she believes, has Ruggiero. What is she doing here? (She's misinformed, the news that one receives not being always reliable, I fear.) But the point is that she thinks so, hates and grieves, and resolves to die if she can't win a clear victory over this woman, impale her and watch as her life blood pours out onto the sand.
- 19 Abruptly she charges, her fury communicating itself to her horse that runs at impressive speed against its opponent and always accelerating. Bradamante's lance lands with a force to exceed what Marfisa expected and creating a phenomenal outcome. The mighty deed leaves Marfisa unhorsed. She's flat on her back from Bradamante's passionate attack.

- 20 Marfisa is filled with chagrin and also rage
for such things do not happen to her. She is
intent on vengeance and determined now to wage
an even more relentless battle. This
is only the beginning. She will engage
with greater force and this time will not miss.
She draws her sword and is ready to recommence
the fight, but to Bradamante this makes no sense.
- 21 She shouts in surprise at Marfisa, “What do you mean
drawing your sword? You are my prisoner now!
The contest is over. My record here is clean.
Your breaking the rules this way, I will not allow!
I am courteous to others,” she says, “but between
you and me, I don’t think so, you arrogant cow!”
Marfisa, hearing this is struck dumb with shock,
and she keens without words like a sea wind on a rock.
- 22 It’s something between a screech and a long wail,
with too much pain in it for the complication
of picking out words that, anyway, would fail.
What is clear nevertheless is her agitation
as she heaves her sword at the other one’s chain mail.
It is only a piece of dexterous equitation
that keeps the blow—off target but with much force—
from severely wounding or even killing her horse.
- 23 At almost the same instant, Amon’s bold
daughter touches Marfisa with her long
lance and it hits and nearly knocks her cold.
She’s flat on her back again and thinks it’s wrong
for this to be happening. Angry a hundred-fold,
she gets up again, and again is struck like a gong
that tolls the hour. Is it her hour at last?
She must do something, she thinks, and do it fast.

- 24 The truth of the matter is that Bradamante is strong but not all that much stronger than her opponent. Indeed, the actual reason for this one-sidedness and her task being easier is that her lance is enchanted and cannot miss—an advantage any jousting would prefer. Marfisa is unaware of this: each blow makes her feel clumsy, vulnerable, and slow.
- 25 Meanwhile, some Christian knights have come to see the jousting—the two encampments are quite close and the match is held in between them in what we call no-man’s land. Agramant seeing those fighters approaching thinks he should not be unprepared (for a sneak attack, I suppose) and he orders men to take their posts. Among those is Ruggiero, and naturally he goes.
- 26 From the rampart he can see the joust and he is worried about Marfisa. His fiancée, Bradamante, is valorous but she has seldom faced an opponent who, one might say, was formidable to at least the same degree. He is quite astonished at the way the first pass came out and he has great concern for both of them, or for each of them in turn.
- 27 It is an awkward business for he finds that one of them he loves with all his heart (that’s Bradamante, of course). But other kinds of love are possible too, and quite apart from passion there’s also sympathy that binds people together. It isn’t very smart but he wants Marfisa to win—or at least not lose. It’s painful to watch them, and he cannot choose.

- 28 What he would have liked is to intervene
and stop the fight, but how to do that without
dishonor? Still, his companions, viewing the scene
and worried that Charlemagne's knight might in this bout
triumph, run onto the field and stand between
the fighters. And then the Christians also come out.
The joust is at once suspended, or let us say
it has turned now into a general *mêlée*.
- 29 Trumpets blast and drums and timbrels roll
as men with horses mount and footmen arm
themselves at once. (Speed of course is the goal
that all their training has fit them for.) With warm
spirit both sides now join in the free-for-all
occasioned by this general alarm.
The skirmish is as sudden as it is bloody.
(Is the one beside you an enemy or a buddy?)
- 30 You'd think she would be happy, and to a degree
she is, but with this happiness is mixed
a certain rage, for it seems to her that he,
having stood her up at the altar must have fixed
his affections elsewhere, and in that case she
is beside herself, or rather say betwixt
a rock and a hard place. She will die of sadness
and take him along with her in her love-madness.
- 31 She has a kind of *Liebested* in mind—
he will die at her own hand and then
they'll meet again in Hell where they may find
a shadowy happiness few women or men
can even imagine in which their souls will bind
together for eternity so that when
their bones have moldered long ago to dust
their love will remain alive as pure loves must.

- 32 “If I should die because of him,” she tells herself, “it is only fair that I should receive retribution. Justice itself compels that I should take his life in exchange. I believe the wrong I suffer more than parallels his, for he deserves it, while I aggrieve no one. If therefore I am to die, then he will have earned a thousand deaths for killing me.
- 33 “Why does my hand then hesitate to inflict that wound upon him that would reciprocate for the one he struck upon my heart? The strict bookkeeping is clear enough. My fate is sealed by a blow no one would contradict as being mortal. I must not hesitate but act with the passion—hotter than that of war’s tumult—to claim the heart my heart adores.
- 34 “Against this pitiless one be pitiless and unite him with me in suffering as we were united in love. Let us, in our duress, restore that sweet communion, for I prefer to be with him even in Hades—yes!—than to be alone either here or there.” So her thoughts cascaded from heart to brain to hand in a way I hope I’ve allowed you to understand.
- 35 She spurs her horse to charge and as she rides calls out to him, “Ruggiero, you take care. You will not have the spoils of your would-be bride’s heart, or not while I yet live!” Anywhere he’d know that beloved voice and he decides she must mean something else entirely. There must be some joke or riddle. Or can it be true? Is she angry at him for missing their rendezvous?

- 36 He signals that he wants to talk, but she ignores him, and she is bearing down now, gaining speed with every yard. And he can see that her visor is closed. There's no sign she is reining her horse to a halt. He realizes that he better ready himself in the time remaining. She's going to do this and he had better prepare to get hit or else to hit Bradamante somewhere.
- 37 It's not the kind of encounter that I suppose love often leads to, but here they are advancing with dangerous hardware as if they were two foes instead of a couple who have been romancing. Each of them is conflicted, heaven knows, and wants to strike a blow that is merely glancing but neither does he or she desire to miss. The ideal thing would be for their lances to kiss.
- 38 Or say that there are three of them on the field, the third being Love whose lance is sharper than those of the parties who, therefore, must yield to force majeure as does any woman or man. Their hearts, having been pierced, cannot be healed, and the fever rages, but Bradamante can not disgrace her dear Ruggiero there and in frustration turns her rage elsewhere.
- 39 Not putting too fine a point on it, she goes berserk and starts killing Saracens in what is a slaughter of truly epic proportions, for those she brings down with her magic lance are not fewer than three hundred. Her Moorish foes scatter as if before a great army but she is all by herself, a horde of one, and she makes it look as though it's good-hearted fun.

- 40 At last there is a lull. Ruggiero draws
close and tells her that if he cannot speak
to her, he'll die, and he asks her what cause
she has for fleeing from him. "All I seek
is a word of explanation!" There is a pause
during which Bradamante feels herself go weak.
As winter's ice in a warm spring wind will soften,
so her heart melts. (This happens fairly often.)
- 41 It is in spite of herself, for she would remain
harder than marble if she could, but she
nudges Rabican to one side to gain
a moment of temporary privacy
in which she can signal to him, making it plain
that she is willing to talk for a moment if he
will follow along behind her into a glade
that is quiet and almost dark in the cypresses' shade.
- 42 There happens to be a recently erected
tomb there of white marble, but in the heat
of the moment they do not notice this unexpected
structure or read the inscription done in neat
Roman letters. The glade, as I've said, is protected,
which is why Bradamante selected it to meet
and listen to Ruggiero, who comes in
to talk with her, suppressing a nervous grin.
- 43 But let us return to Marfisa who, interim,
has remounted her horse and now is fast pursuing
Bradamante, her determination grim
to continue the battle. Unaware of what they are doing,
she assumes that Bradamante is fighting with him
and it does not cross her mind that they might be wooing.
She urges her horse to run flat out and she
arrives just behind them, almost immediately.

- 44 Bradamante is not pleased that a third person is there at this delicate moment—and she can think of no one she would have less preferred than this particular woman she’s taken to be her rival. It is ridiculous and absurd, and also the final proof to her that he is woefully fickle and flighty. What other than love could bring Marfisa here, chasing her man?
- 45 She tells Ruggiero, “You are vile and base! I have heard the reports of your dreadful lack of faith. Must I also look at her, face to face? You betrayed me with her as soon as I turned my back. Was it your purpose to drive me away? In that case all I want is to die—but I shall attack her so that she will die with me, the cause of my demise as much as your own flaws.”
- 46 So much for the viper’s hiss. What happens then in these herpetological metaphors is the quick strike, if not with poisoned fangs that men and women lack, but a lance can do the trick. Bradamante thrusts at Marfisa’s shield and when that happens the latter goes down and falls like a brick. Worse, as she lands she happens to hit her head so hard on the ground it’s amazing that she’s not dead.
- 47 Amon’s daughter is angry enough to put the magic lance aside and in its place take her short sword with which she intends to cut Marfisa’s head off. She dismounts with grace and advances toward the supine Marfisa, but the latter, expecting that she will have to face Bradamante’s attack, gets quickly to her feet and in their fury the two armed women meet.

- 48 Marfisa is unaccustomed to these falls
that she has endured many times on this wretched day
and her dudgeon is high as Bradamante's. It galls
her to have to be getting up this way.
Ruggiero is shouting to both of them, but his calls
have no effect, for neither is willing to stay
her wrath or her weapon. How can either abate
in her altogether justifiable hate?
- 49 Sword hilt to sword hilt, they are toe to toe
as they grapple for advantage and tromp the ground.
The two of them seem to embrace one another although
in hatred and they are unable to hear the sound
of Ruggiero's repeated shouts of "No, no, no!"
Both swords get knocked away with the dismal sound
of clanging metal. Ruggiero's pursuit
of a momentary truce isn't bearing fruit.
- 50 He decides that if he must use force, he will.
He grabs the daggers that they still hold and now
neither of them is armed, but even still
they continue their struggle anyway, anyhow,
beating with fists and kicking and, in their shrill
voices, screaming insults, and the row
is a shouting match of imprecations and curses
to set down which would take us many verses.
- 51 Ruggiero doesn't give up: first he takes one
and then the other, by sheer force, pulling her back
in order to keep great harm from being done
in this desperate and unorthodox attack.
He hides their daggers, but still the Amazon
free-for-all continues as they whack
away with steel gauntlets on the steel
breastplates with blows that are louder than they feel.

- 52 Marfisa is now annoyed at him and she takes
her sword from the ground and comes to attack her friend
for butting in this way—it really makes
her furious, and it’s impolite. We tend
to appeal to the rules of etiquette when someone breaks
with decorum but also whatever, in the end,
it is that we want and think that we deserve.
Ruggiero, she believes, has a hell of a nerve.
- 53 “Lout! Churl!” she shouts. “What do you mean
interfering in our engagement? Who
appointed you judge or guardian? I’ve been
insulted here, and I can take on you two
and beat you both together. I am keen
to vindicate my honor. Form a queue
or come at me as you will.” Ruggiero tries
to speak to her in words that are gentle and wise,
- 54 but she is having none of it. She is
determined to do what she does so well and fight
not only the interfering knight but his
doxy too. Good Ruggiero might
better have kept his lips sealed tight in this
complicated business. Well, all right,
they wield their swords—and Bradamante is pleased
to see them fighting because her heart is eased.
- 55 He’s an embodiment of Mars and she
is a fury of Hell as they come at each other in
a frenzy—but something checks them somehow that we
will understand in a moment or two. The din
is most impressive, but the blows they deliver must be
with the flat of the blade rather than with the thin
edge for neither is hurt, or at least not yet.
And they’re both fighting hard enough to break a sweat.

- 56 Or maybe it's just dumb luck on both sides. She comes down with a mighty blow that's meant to cleave his skull in twain, but fortunately he raises his shield for its eagle to receive the assault. The stroke then hits his pauldron, which we know is enchanted too, but I do not believe that this is enough to prevent his forearm from the blunt force of the blow—and it goes numb.
- 57 This makes him angry. No more Mr. Nice. He can barely move his left arm, but his right is perfectly fine. He raises his sword to slice Marfisa in small pieces, for now the fight is in deadly earnest and only death will suffice to vindicate his honor and keep it bright. He thrusts the point of his sharp sword at her with a force and speed that very rarely err.
- 58 But what is this? He misses! The sword point goes into the trunk of one of those cypress trees and sinks deep in the wood—I would suppose a palm's breadth at least. And then all three of them freeze for there is a mighty earthquake and from its repose in the tomb and its proper place in eternity's security, a spirit speaks in tones that strike fear into their hearts and even their bones.
- 59 The voice commands them to stop and tells them why: "It is inhumane for sister and brother to fight, Neither Marfisa nor Ruggiero should die at the other's hand. It would not be meet or right. Would you take it upon yourselves to defy the laws of heaven and sin in heaven's sight? Believe this voice that speaks to you from the tomb. You came at the same time from the same womb."

60–84 *The voice is that of Atlas' ghost, and he tells the twins how he found them, had them suckled by a tame lioness, and how they are descendants of Hector (another boy having been substituted for Astyanax, who thus escaped being thrown from the walls of Troy). A gang of Arabs kidnapped Marfisa, but Ruggiero ran faster and wasn't caught, which is how they were separated. And at his death Atlas made a deal with Charon that his tomb would be placed in this glade, where it was fated that brother and sister would fight with each other and he could separate them. Marfisa and Ruggiero embrace, and Bradamante is entirely mollified.*

[Canto XXXVII omitted]

Canto Trentessimottavo

1–28 *Bradamante and Marfisa appear at Charlemagne's court, where they are warmly welcomed. Marfisa tells her story to Charlemagne and is baptized by Archbishop Turpin. Ariosto then resumes the story of Astolfo, who has come back from the moon in John's chariot with the elixir for Orlando's madness. John also shows him an herb that will cure the blindness of the King of Nubia. Astolfo flies on the hippogryph to Nubia and cures King Senapo. By way of thanks, Senapo gives him more than a hundred thousand men with whom Astolfo can invade Bizerta (in Tunis), which is Agramant's kingdom.*

29 The night before the expedition leaves,
Astolfo flies on the hippogryph into the heart
of Africa where Auster lives. He perceives
that it dwells in a cave in which, as the very smart
evangelist advises, it conceives
its mischief. He explains to his stalwart
friend that he is taking a wineskin—a trap
for the fierce wind when it wakes up from its nap.

- 30 Bizarrely enough it works, for when the wind
arises and, still groggy, tries to go
out of the cave, he finds that he's been confined
to the inside of a wineskin from which there is no
possible egress. Carrying this behind
him, Astolfo flies until, below,
he sees the Nubian army that has stayed
in readiness for him, splendidly arrayed.
- 31 He sets out with his army of black men
to cross the desert sands. They make their way
without any fear of sandstorms that now and then
cause difficulty in travel, for tucked away
in the wineskin is the wind that comes up when
one least expects it. Astolfo could allay
any such fears, and they make good progress to
the Atlas mountain pass with an ocean view.
- 32 Here he has them pause and he selects
the best of them, a kind of elite corps.
He has them fall in in order and expects
of course to be obeyed at once, for war
demands such discipline in all respects.
He excuses himself and climbs to a nearby tor,
intent on mighty deeds or even magic
as we read about in poems epic or tragic.
- 33 There, he gets down upon his knees to pray
to Jesus Christ his holy master to grant
the miracle he needs. Then, right away,
he begins to roll large boulders down. I can't
describe how huge they are, but let me say
that they grow even as they fall—and relevant
to the story is that somewhere in their courses
downward they all turn somehow into horses.

34 Some are bay, some gray, some roan, some white,
and they prance together as spirited steeds will do.
The footmen of the army express their delight
as they choose mounts and get promoted to
cavalrymen who are eager now to fight.
Eighty thousand one hundred and two
Astolfo creates in an afternoon. All things
are permitted to one who believes in the King of Kings.

35–70 *With this great force, Astolfo and his Nubians invade and pillage Agramant's territories in north Africa. Agramant's deputies send a galley back to Arles to report to him that they are being laid waste, and he must decide whether to return to Africa or continue to fight in France. In counsel, some of his advisors recommend returning while others want to stay, but King Sobrino of Garbo suggests letting the war be ended by single combat—of Ruggiero against anyone Charlemagne nominates. Charlemagne names Rinaldo (Orlando is mad and unavailable). Ruggiero is honored but torn, because Rinaldo is Bradamante's brother. If Ruggiero wins, her love for him will turn to hatred. And, indeed, when Bradamante hears what is to happen, she calls Ruggiero an ingrate and complains that her destiny is cruel.*

71 However it ends, it will be dreadful indeed.
If Ruggiero is killed, her own heart will
be mortally wounded (although it may not bleed).
If Jesus punishes France for its sins, she still
will lose her own dear brother. And she will need
to break off with Ruggiero for having done ill
to her family and her nation, or otherwise face
insults, contumely, obloquy, and disgrace.

72 What she has been living for is the chance
of reuniting in public with her dear
Ruggiero and of marrying him in France.
Such an ambition, it is now all too clear,

is doomed because of the terrible circumstance
in which they find themselves. A leaden fear
that she will never see him again possesses
her heart, and she scratches her cheeks and tugs her tresses.

73–76 *The magician Melissa hears Bradamante's complaints and comes to console her and offer help. Meanwhile, Rinaldo and Ruggiero prepare for their combat. Rinaldo, having lost his good Bayard, wants to fight on foot. Malagigi, a sorcerer and Rinaldo's cousin, warns that Ruggiero's sword Balisarda is formidable. So Rinaldo declines the use of swords but limits the bout to axes and daggers. They set up the match on a great plain near Arles with a tent at each end beside each of which there are altars.*

77 At first light, the pagans form up on the field
with Marsilio in his barbaric royal get up.
Beside him is Ruggiero who will wield
his weapons for their side, which is as fed up
as Charlemagne is with fighting and its yield
of blood and corpses with scarcely any let up.
He rides a charger, bay with a black mane,
and enters attended by the King of Spain.

78 Marsilio is not too proud to bear
his helmet—Hector's helmet, you will recall,
from Troy a thousand years before. And there,
with other weapons and pieces of armor, all
adorned with gold and set about with rare
jewels, are other kings who are standing tall
and honoring Ruggiero, for he will be
the one who will determine their destiny.

79 From the other end comes Charlemagne with his
men-at-arms who are in their battle array.
His peers surround him, and of course there is
Rinaldo, who looks magnificent today

in full armor except for his helmet, and this
is carried by the paladin Ogier,
who is from Denmark. (This helmet Rinaldo took
from King Mambrino—earlier than our book.)

80 There are the battle axes: Duke Namor has
one, and Salomon, King of Brittany
holds the other. No one walks on the grass
at the center of the field except for the
two contestants (the ancient custom was
that anyone who trespassed there would be
put to death at once). The choice between
the weapons is Ruggiero's. He tests the keen

81 edges and settles on one of them. Then the two
priests, Christian and pagan, appear to bless
the encounter and pray that victory may ensue
for the champions in the faiths that they profess.
One holds a Koran, the other has the New
Testament with the Gospels. They address
their respective Lords at opposite ends of the plain—
Agramant, I mean, and Charlemagne.

82–90 *Each king swears to pay tribute to the other if his champion should be
defeated. Each champion swears that if he is withdrawn from the fray
by his king, he will then serve the other king. The bout begins, with
Ruggiero more on the defensive than he might otherwise be, because he
is fighting with Bradamante's brother.*

Canto Trentesimonono

I Ruggiero is in an impossible position,
for either Rinaldo will kill him (this is not good)
or he will, to his very great contrition,
have to kill Rinaldo—and then he would

get from Bradamante what he wouldn't wish on
his worst foe. It must be understood
that love and fear are closely intertwined
both in the heart of a lover and in the mind.

- 2 Rinaldo of course has no such constraints and he
strikes with enthusiasm with his ax
as if he were out in the woods felling a tree
and enjoying the exercise as he takes hacks
into its soft trunk. With a similar glee
he aims at the arms or the head in these attacks.
Ruggiero uses the weapon that he carries
defensively in a series of dexterous parries.
- 3 The pagan lords are puzzled. Why is their guy
so much less aggressive than his foe?
He appears to be holding back. They wonder why
and how it could be? Ruggiero has never been slow
before. To the very knowledgeable eye
of Agramant it seems that Ruggiero may go
down at any moment. What ails the man?
He blames Sobrino for having proposed this plan!
- 4 This is the moment Melissa chooses to do
what she has promised and she now appears in the guise
of Rodomonte, in every detail true
and accurate—for when a magician tries
to play these tricks of impersonation, you
haven't the slightest prompting to realize
that something is amiss. She enters the field
in his dragon's hide armor and carrying his shield.
- 5 She spurs her demon horse and arrives before
King Agramant to tell him that he has made
a grave mistake, saying he, Rodomonte, is more
skilled and stronger and would not have been afraid

to go at Rinaldo properly. “You should ignore the arrangements you’ve made and instead let each man’s blade redeem the honor of Africa. Let us choose to attack together, for otherwise we’ll lose.

6 “Never mind your oath. Consider rather that it is your kingdom itself that’s now at stake. Let each man see how many souls he can gather in the grim harvest of death that we shall make of Christians with whose impure blood we will slather the grass, for I am here, and for my sake every man of ours will be brave and bold and our strength will multiply a hundredfold.”

7 Having despaired at the prospect before him that the single combat would lose him the war, the king now rushed forward, eagerly grasping at this chance to avoid disaster. Signaling to his men that they should join him in combat, he charged at the Christians’ pavilion, uttering bellicose cries. Melissa, having started this battle and done what she’d wanted, now departed.

8 The champions are astonished. What in the hell is going on? The agreements? The solemn oath each king had taken? People are running pell-mell and fighting at random everywhere. They both agree to suspend their combat until they can tell who broke the agreement first. And each is loath to lend his strength to the side that deserves the blame for breaking chivalry’s laws to its great shame.

9 They take new oaths that they will now unite against those who lacked faith and violated the field of honor. Around them some men fight and others, who, I’m afraid, have to be rated

as cowards, try to flee. Thus between fright
and bravery men are roiled in an agitated
mass of bodies moving in all directions
with many random collisions and deflections.

10 Have you ever seen a greyhound watching game
darting across a field and quartering back,
frustrated because the hunter with whom she came
keeps her leashed and will not let her attack?
She barks in vain and tugs at the lead. The same
with Marfisa and Bradamante, who glowered black
frustrated fury because they had to obey
the rules and could not participate in the fray.

11 All those Saracens wanting to be killed
and all those targets milling about in rich
profusion! All that blood that could be spilled
and not to be permitted to do that which
they long to do and do so well. They are filled
with anger and chagrin—like that fine bitch
greyhound. But the pacts are broken and they
are free to romp and slaughter as they may.

12 Marfisa drives her spear through the first man she
meets, and its point and shaft emerge from his
back two cubits and then, sequentially,
with her sword she shatters four helmets of this
disorganized mob. And Bradamante we see
operating otherwise: she is
roaming the field across its length and breadth
and felling many but not causing their death.

13 Each of them watches the other in admiration,
at least for a while, but then they separate
and follow their fury's whimsy. The Moorish nation
they scatter and slaughter and more than decimate.

Who can give any sensible estimation
of the damage they did? Rather than narrate,
let me propose, instead, a metaphor
to suggest what they managed to do here in this war.

- 14 Imagine a warm spring day when the winds are mild
and the snowmelt runs down the Apennines with two
roiling rivers meeting in the wild
cascade of their descent. See what they do
to the tall trees and the boulders that are piled
along their banks, vying with each other to
see which can wreak more havoc as they flow,
washing detritus downstream as they go.
- 15 So those two great-hearted women raced
about the field inflicting ruin to
whomever they happened to find and whomever they faced
with spear and sword, and each blade striking true.
Agramant was appalled as the women chased
his panicky soldiers. What was he to do?
Where in this tumult was Rodomonte? He
seemed to have vanished, and most inconveniently.

16–24 *Rodomonte isn't (never was) there. Horrified that Agramant broke his oath, King Marsilio and King Sobrino flee to Arles. Charlemagne's forces kill vast numbers of Saracens in a general rout. Ariosto then resumes the story of Astolfo in Africa. All the best Saracen troops have gone to fight under Agramant, and children, old men, and even women are left to defend their territory, but at the first sight of Astolfo's huge army they flee. Astolfo then thinks of crossing to France to help Charlemagne in the campaign there.*

- 25 Astolfo, after all, had come with a force
that could have defeated seven Africas. He
remembered John's exhortation now, of course,
to take Provence and Auges Mortes by the sea

back from the Saracens. These were serious chores,
and he chose a group of soldiers he took to be
the least unlikely sailors he could find
for the maritime adventure he had in mind.

26 This time Astolfo visits several oases
and gathers baskets of leaves from the branches of trees,
citron, olive, and palm, mostly. He places
these in the water, or floats them on the sea's
surface, one should say. In unusual cases,
with those whom God has especially favored, these
miracles can happen. They are rare
but they do occur, as one did then and there.

27 The leaves increased in size before their eyes,
grew longer, wider, curved, and the leaf veins
became the keels and braces of hulls. It defies
the imagination, but still the fact remains
that from the different kinds of leaves arise
quite different vessels, which in part explains
how there were galleons, sloops, and brigantines,
all variously rigged by these strange means.

28 Sails neatly furled, they ride with bright work gleaming,
proud vessels with their matching painted oars.
Astolfo wonders if he might not be dreaming,
and he gives thanks to heaven and implores
further prosperity. Meanwhile, he is scheming
about choosing men who have lived along the shores
or on the islands so they can manage these
splendid vessels out on the high seas.

29–35 *As Astolfo is about to depart (with Dudone, a paladin he has ransomed
from the Africans), a Saracen ship arrives with Christian prisoners.
Astolfo and Dudone free various prominent knights and send the mas-*

ter of this vessel to the galleys. There is a celebratory banquet, which is interrupted by reports of a call to arms.

- 36 Astolfo and his guests leave the banquet hall and mount their horses to go and investigate the cause of this general panic, asking all the people they meet if they know the cause of the great disturbance. At last they see for themselves—a tall naked man, swinging a club of great weight and leaving a swath of ruin. All alone he moves along like a ruinous cyclone.
- 37 He swings the club like a huge scythe and it reaps men, bringing them down, some crippled, some stone dead. He does this to scads, heaps, myriads . . . Anyway many. Protection from his rampage is impossible. A brave man keeps a healthy distance and fires arrows that come close but do not seem to hurt for he was given that gift of imperviosity.
- 38 Dudone, Astolfo, Oliver, Brandimart stand and wonder at this prodigiously strong and utterly wild man who is taking apart in minutes a whole town that it took long years to build and inhabit. But then they start at a girl's sudden arrival, at which the throng hesitates. Who is this coming onto the scene on horseback? A friend or an enemy? What does it mean?
- 39 It's Fiordiligi who gallops up and dismounts to fling her arms around Brandimart, whom she left at that narrow bridge. Since then, the founts of her eyes have flowed in sorrow abundantly

and she has been searching for him. The pagans' accounts were that he was a captive across the sea down in Algiers—to which she had come in haste, no matter what dangers or obstacles she faced.

- 40 In Marseilles she'd had a stroke of luck, for there she had found an elderly knight of the retinue of King Monodante. Almost in despair he had been searching for Brandimart. He knew the knight from childhood at Castle Silvana where he'd brought him up and trained him. She could do them both a favor: she told him that she'd had word that Brandimart was in Africa. (He hadn't heard.)
- 41 He is Bardino, and he'd looked far and wide through all the towns and villages of France as well as the woods and fields of the countryside hoping to find some clue or hear a chance remark that might be helpful. They decide to keep the ship he's arrived on and advance to Africa to help in any way they can. Weigh anchor, then, and farewell Marseilles!
- 42 As soon as they land, of course, they hear the news that Astolfo has besieged Bizerte. Perhaps Brandimart is with him? Do they confuse hopes with rational thinking? (It is a lapse difficult to avoid, and we excuse lovers in particular.) But what caps her optimistic quest is that she's right and there he is before her in plain sight!
- 43 Brandimart is utterly transported with joy and love, and he clasps her to his breast for here is the faithful woman he has courted and loves more than any other, more than the rest

of the world. She redeems all the painful and sordid aspects of life. He feels that they are blessed, and kisses her again and again until he notices Bardino—another thrill.

44 He holds his arms out for an abbruzzo and he is about to ask why Bardino is here, but there would be time to talk if the danger were not so great and growing ever closer. Fear has gripped the people, now the naked pazzo is only paces away. But isn't it queer? Fiordiligi looks him straight in the eye and recognizes . . . Orlando! My, oh my!

45 Astolfo sees it too, but this is because John described a birthmark or some such sign that he should look for. The others dropped their jaws in utter amazement. How could such a fine fellow be turned into a beast that gnaws the bones of beasts? Indeed, can you draw a line between those beasts and this hairy apparition? If it is he, how came he to this condition?

46 Pity pierces Astolfo's breast and deep in his beating heart strikes a wound. His eyes well up with tears. It is difficult to keep his feelings under control, although he tries and manages—if just barely—not to weep. "See, it is Orlando—in this guise that suffering has given him." (He looks like one of those monsters we see in children's books.)

47 He tells Dudone and Oliver how this is, indeed, Orlando, and they too are deeply grieved. Astolfo tells them that his purpose is to cure him—hard to do

and yet not quite impossible, for there is
an elixir which he has with him (as you
all of course remember). He dismounts
as the others do too, and they prepare to pounce

- 48 upon the paladin and hold him down.
But as Orlando sees their circle shrink tight
he swings his club more desperately around
and around. It was Dudone, the saintly knight,
whom he first struck a glancing blow on his crown.
(He was holding his shield over his head and might
otherwise have had his helmet and his head
shattered to bits and therefore wound up dead.)
- 49 Still, it knocked him flat, and at the same time
Sansonetto struck with his sword so hard
that even though Orlando parried it, I'm
bound to say it diminished the club by a yard.
Brandimart seized his waist (as if to climb
a tree when one grabs the trunk). While he was off guard
Astolfo seized his legs and held on tight,
and he was, remember, a very puissant knight.
- 50 But Orlando shook himself and off he flew
to land on his head at least ten paces away,
but Brandimart was still holding on like glue.
Oliver came too close and in the fray
was hit so hard on the side of the head that he grew
pale, fell down, and it looked as though he'd stay
down for the count—for although he tried to rise
he fell again, and was bleeding from nose and eyes.
- 51 I ought not to interrupt the narrative flow
but one must observe the value of having the best
helmet one can find. There would have been no
chance for Oliver otherwise. Invest

in excellent equipment before you go
off to fight. After their little rest
Dudone and Sansonetto rise and when
they do they go after Orlando once again.

- 52 Dudone has him from behind and tries
to make him fall down, while Astolfo and his
companions have his arms, but they realize
that crazy Orlando is like a bull that is
tormented by a pack of dogs he defies
by dragging them along with him (but this
is hardly comforting, for some poor mutt
will get itself killed this way, more often than not).
- 53 At this point Oliver gets back up and sees
how little progress they're making with the mad
Orlando using Astolfo's tactics. These
are not succeeding. His idea is not bad
and worth a try instead of what guarantees
repeated disaster. Oliver, clever lad,
has ropes brought, each of them with a running noose.
His plan is that they can use them as lassoes.
- 54 He loops their ends around Orlando's arms
and legs and pulls them taut, and he gives the ends
to some of the bolder townsfolk who, on farms,
had learned to throw a horse or an ox. His friends
help out as well and in not too long swarms
of people are pulling at him so that he bends
and finally falls to the ground, and then they can
bind even more securely this powerful man.
- 55 Orlando twists and turns and writhes and strains
but he cannot break so many sturdy cords,
and despite his mighty effort and his pains
he is their captive. Now they move him towards

the water, as Astolfo directs. It remains
for the patient—let us not mince any words—
to be washed, not once but seven times so he
may be purified to receive the remedy.

56 All the muck they wash and scrape from his face
and limbs, and dunk him over and over again.
They rub and scrub in every conceivable place
until Astolfo is satisfied, and then,
with certain herbs he needs for this rare case,
he fills Orlando's mouth in order that when
he takes a breath it will have to be through his nose—
which is, as you may have guessed, where the medicine goes.

57 This Astolfo has ready in the flask
he holds to the paladin's nostrils so that he
inhales the precious essence. (Do not ask
what's in it. Psychopharmacology
is not my long suit.) Still, it does its task
and Orlando's mind is restored, his lunacy
cured by the stuff from the moon. It's very clever,
and his powers of reason and judgment are better than ever.

58 He is like one who has woken from a strange
nightmare with monsters everywhere making threats
that harass him continually. They range
about him in the night. But now that he gets
his bedroom back, his life, and the light, they change
into his friends and comrades. He regrets
that he seems to be, for whatever reason, nude,
which strikes him as both indecorous and rude.

59 He looks at Brandimart, at Oliver, at
Astolfo, wondering how they came to him
or he to them. He has no notion what
he has been doing or where, not even a dim

recollection. It is surely a mercy that
he can't recall. He's damp: has he been for a swim?
There are ropes about his body, but nothing else.
Maybe his friends know why, but no one tells.

60 His very first words are those that Virgil gave
Silenus, which is fairly literary.
"Solvite me," he said in the hollow cave
where he'd been held—tied up, so it was very
apropos. He put on his plight as brave
a face as he could with that not extraordinary
but recognizable joke. Few madmen joke,
and he put his friends at ease with that deft stroke.

61 They bring him clothes and, as he dresses, he
realizes that there is another change
that has taken place, for now he is quite free
of Love, and its obsessions all seem strange
and even absurd. He understands that she
never deserved his love. And to derange
his wits for her? The operations of Cupid
often in retrospect can seem quite stupid.

62–65 *Bardino tells Brandimart that his father Monodante is dead and that, therefore, Brandimart is needed at home. Brandimart refuses, saying he will stay with Orlando and serve Charlemagne until the war is over. Dudone the Dane sets sail for Provence while Orlando and Asolfo consult, and they lay siege to Bizerte. Ariosto then turns his attention to the Moors being pursued by the French.*

66 Agramant, you will remember, has been betrayed.
Marsilio and Sobrino fled to town
worried what might have happened if they had stayed.
And even there, they did not hang around

but both embarked at once, for they were afraid
no place in France was safe. And then to crown
their cowardice, more Moors, whose fears were ample,
followed the two kings' cowardly example.

- 67 King Agramant is braver and he keeps on
fighting until it is clear that there's no way
he can resist further with so many gone.
He heads back to the town where he can stay
behind the walls. But following close upon
him and his men, Bradamante is eager to slay
the man who has kept her and Ruggiero apart
so often. She wants to rip out his living heart.
- 68 Marfisa, too, is after him, for she
wants vengeance for his killing of her father.
The two of them pursue with celerity,
spurring their noble steeds into a lather,
but neither arrives in time, for there, you see,
the gates are closed—and all their strenuous bother
goes for naught. Agramant, inside,
is waiting to ship out on the next high tide.
- 69 Think of two high-spirited leopards let
off the leash to hunt down a chamois or deer
that they have chased but somehow failed to get.
When they come back they hang their heads in a clear
show of chagrin. So with these two, regret
is on their faces, having come so near
and yet having failed. But they did not submit
to disappointment; they made good use of it.
- 70 There were lots of Moors outside the gate who had
nowhere to flee to and thus were ideal toys
for these two maddened women. It was bad
to be on that plain, for each of them enjoys

beheading, stabbing, and killing, and they are glad to leave a trail of corpses. (Who destroys more, I cannot begin to estimate either by their numbers or gross weight.)

71 Nowhere to go. Not only were the gates locked tight but all of the bridges across the Rhone had been torn down. Tradition there relates tales of those who drowned in the river, unknown numbers of them. And on the banks their mates' blood formed little rivulets that shone red in the twilight. Only a few were rich enough for ransoms. The rest died in some ditch.

72 It was, as I am trying hard to suggest, a dreadful slaughter. Many on both sides died, but the Christians surely had the best of the battle, for if some reason one divides the numbers of those men who went to their rest that day, the Saracen body-count provides something to contemplate. Upon those grounds one still can find many rows of their grave mounds.

73 Agramant has the heavier ships put out to sea but leaves some smaller vessels for those who have somehow saved themselves. (I doubt there were many of these in that kind of a war.) The winds are adverse, but then they turn about and he can return home to the African shore. Even with this improvement in wind and weather, it remains a dreadful business altogether.

74–82 *Agramant, at sea, encounters the fleet of leaf-boats at night and in a fog. Dudone attacks with grappling hooks and hand-to-hand fighting,*

*as well as with ramming vessels that sink some of Agramant's ships.
Agramant faces a shower of arrows from far off, and swords and axes
from up close.*

- 83 Agramant sees boulders fall from the sky
that were launched from catapults on Dudone's ships.
They open holes in hulls or, quite nearby,
slice a prow from one of his vessels that dips
and soon slips under water while, on high,
the sails of another are burning and wind whips
the fires hotter. The loud cries filling the air
are not of anger but panic and despair.
- 84 One is pursued by a man with a sword and he
jumps overboard in desperation but there
he flails about and then drowns in the sea.
Another jumps from his ship to another where
the battle may be going better, but we
see that the crew of the second does not care
for company and while he still has his hand
on the gunwale it gets cut off. (I understand
- 85 the phrase "all hands on deck," in the light of this
grisly moment.) The rest of the body falls
into the water which it stains with his
flowing blood. Another sailor recalls
that drowning is almost painless. Whether it is
or not, he never finds out, for a timber falls
that's burning, and he grabs it and he goes
both by fire and water—so who knows?
- 86 Others jump in, hoping to drown, but they
are struck by an arrow on their way down and die
before they hit the water. How can one say
what horrors there were that night? I will not try,

especially now, for it's late and the light of day
is about to show itself in the eastern sky.
We have had, I think, for this night a surfeit of words,
and I bid you a pleasant goodnight, my ladies and lords.

[Cantos XL through XLV omitted]

Canto Quarantesimosesto et Ultimo

1–100 *Ambassadors from Bulgaria offer their throne to Ruggiero. Duke Amon of Dordogne and his wife now are reconciled to Bradamante's marriage to Ruggiero, and the wedding is celebrated with the greatest splendor, Charlemagne providing for Bradamante as though she were his own daughter.*

101 On the last day of the festival, there was a great
feast that Charlemagne gave to honor the pair,
with Ruggiero on his left, and his new mate,
Bradamante on his right side in the chair
of honor to bask in the gathering's love . . . But wait,
what is this? A knight in armor comes there
proud in appearance, riding a black horse,
and, cap a pie, his armor is black, of course.

102 This is the King of Algiers, whom we all know.
It's Rodomonte who, after that disgrace
he suffered at Bradamante's hands, could show
his face no longer but took himself to a place
remote from mankind where a hermit might go,
and he swore not to grip a sword or lance for the space
of a year and also a month and also a day.
Knights back then used to punish themselves this way.

- 103 During that time, he hears what is going on with Charlemagne and with Agramant. He is king after all, and servants wait upon him in the cave which helps to comfort his hermit-ship. He is however a non-participant in the fighting, having this solemn oath he's taken. But time has run, and there are no more constraints upon him. None.
- 104 So here he is. He does not dismount or bow his head or salute, or give any sign of respect to Charlemagne and his lords, who wonder how a man can be so uncouth and incorrect. They stop their eating and drinking and all are now staring at him, not knowing what to expect. What is he, some kind of nut? Or could it be worse, someone who's come to deliver a challenge or curse?
- 105 He proclaims himself in a loud voice, almost a shout: "My name is Rodomonte and I am the King of Sarza." After a breath's pause he calls out, "I come to challenge Ruggiero and I bring the charge that he is a traitor, beyond all doubt, who does not deserve the honor you show him. I fling my gauntlet down, by which I signify what, being a Christian now, he cannot deny.
- 106 "I come to prove it upon you in a trial by combat—if you have one here who will fight to attempt to vindicate you. I declare that I'll accept whomever you chose—a single knight or half a dozen. I shall fight them while breath remains in me to maintain the right." For a moment there is silence, but by and by Ruggiero rises to give the knight the lie!

- 107 He says he has always been a faithful and true subject of his king, and anyone who called him a traitor was speaking what he knew to be palpably false. He was quite ready to defend his cause, which he said he could do without any help from anyone else. “And you will have enough trouble dealing with me alone,” he said, and then he nodded to the throne.
- 108 But other guests at the banquet volunteered, saying that it was not right for a groom to disturb his wedding day, as it appeared this challenge required. Others in the room would be more than glad to stand in for him. The revered Orlando or Rinaldo or, I assume Oliver and his sons, Grifon the White and Aquilant the Black, all wanted to fight.
- 109 Also Marfisa, Dudone, and many more offered to take his place, but he declined saying that only he was responsible for his honor—and if he was to be maligned he would either reply on his own account or bear the shame of it always. But never mind, he doesn’t need any reasons. The choice is his, and they must be content: it is what it is.
- 110 They fetch his armor. Orlando helps put on his elegant spurs, and Charlemagne girds his sword at his waist as Bradamante helps him don his corselet with Marfisa. The Danish lord Ogier holds his stirrup, whereupon he mounts his splendid horse. Then to afford him room to move, Namo and Rinaldo call to the crowd, “Give way,” and of course they all do.

- 111 You have seen in the fields a sudden wind arise
when the doves are frightened and flutter home to take
whatever shelter their nests afford. Likewise
with the women and young girls who, for the sake
of Ruggiero are fearful, for in their eyes
he is not his challenger's equal. They quake
in terror for Rodomonte, single-handed,
ruined much of Paris, to be quite candid.
- 112 If in a one-man sortie he could lay waste
the army and the capital city of France,
what were the odds that poor Ruggiero faced,
and could anyone imagine that he had a chance?
There isn't a knight or a baron who wasn't disgraced
in that terrible rout. And in such a circumstance
they look with grave concern as the black horse ambles
onto the field which they fear will turn into a shambles.
- 113 Even more than all the others who
look on, Bradamante worries for him. She thinks
he's no less strong or able. That's quite true.
But she is in love with him and therefore shrinks
from the thought of what chance and luck can sometimes do
so that the better man may lose, and she blinks
and cannot bear to watch. Indeed she would
rather fight Rodomonte herself, if she could.
- 114 The worst that could happen would be that instead of her
adored Ruggiero, she would die for him
and he would live, which is what she would prefer.
She would give her life for him many times (a dim
idea, but sometimes logic must defer
to fervor). Still, her chances were very slim
of persuading him to let her go out on the field,
no matter how earnestly she might have appealed.

- 115 So there she is on the sidelines with the crowd
watching as the knights come from the right
and left to meet at the center with a loud
report of iron on iron. It is a sight
to see, as the sturdy lances of the proud
warriors shatter like icicles in the night,
sending a shower of oaken splinters here
and there and reinforcing the spectators' fear.
- 116 Rodomonte's lance hits a resounding blow
at Ruggiero's shield that Vulcan had
fashioned himself for Hector, and there was no
weapon that could pierce it. (The *Iliad*
says so.) But Ruggiero's lance can go
through Rodomonte's good steel plates that clad
a center of bone. He would have been impaled
but the weapon shattered and in its purpose failed.
- 117 Both of the chargers at the shock of the collision
go back on their cruppers but then they manage to rise
as each of the riders comes to the decision
to discard his broken lance. Each of them tries
now with the sword. (This takes both strength and precision
as well as strategic thinking, you realize,
for this is fencing on horseback, and one must be
able to manage his mount instinctively.)
- 118 They feel each other out, or rather say
that they try to find weak places in the suit
of armor the other wears. Is there a way
to penetrate its defenses, some minute
space into which an opponent might essay
to reach soft flesh? Each is resolute
but careful, prodding, poking, trying blows
to see the effect of where the steel blade goes.

- 119 Rodomonte does not have his dragon-hide armor, nor does he hold Nimrod's great sword or his usual helmet on his head. Beside that river they were Bradamante's reward that she hung on the shrine wall. (Please do not chide or blame me, some of you who may be bored, for reminding you sometimes of what you recall. A few of you may, I think, but perhaps not all.)
- 120 What he was wearing wasn't at all bad, if not so splendid as what he'd lost, but what could have resisted Balisarda, the blade Ruggiero wielded of tempered steel that could cut through armor any human being had made even if enchanted—as his was not? And here and there Ruggiero's proddings found a weak or unguarded place that he could wound.
- 121 The pagan sees the blood and it drives him to an even greater frenzy. He is a storm that suddenly intensifies with new strength that it somehow draws up from the warm water below to hurricane force that few can withstand as it brings universal harm wherever it wanders. In desperation he discards his shield so that both his hands are free.
- 122 He strikes with all his might, bringing the sword down on top of Ruggiero's helmet. Have you seen that pile-driver (*battipalo's* the word they use down there)? What it's supposed to do is sink piles in the mud of the Po, and I've heard they raise a weight on pulleys with ratchet and screw, and then they let it fall with enormous force. The metaphor's application is clear, of course.

- 123 Had the helmet not been magic, the sword would have cleft
it and the skull and the rider at one blow,
and maybe even the horse, and what would be left
would be two disgusting but matching halves but, no,
the magic worked. Recovering with a deft
move, Rodomonte has another go,
a second strike, and a third for heaven's sakes,
but at this juncture, the blade of his sword breaks.
- 124 This might slow down a lesser combatant, but he
rushes at Ruggiero who is, I suppose,
groggy from that pounding, as one would be,
and the Saracen grabs his neck in one of those
choke holds, which works to tear Ruggiero free
of his stirrups and he goes down with his metal clothes
making a dismal clangor. He hits the ground
and sees Bradamante as he looks around.
- 125 He notices how her face is troubled now,
and he is filled with shame more than with any
anger. The furrows on her so elegant brow
inspire him and he leaps to his feet again. He
grips his sword and, with a silent vow
that this won't happen again (you can bet your last penny),
he advances toward Rodomonte who is still
on his horse with a look that by itself could kill.
- 126 The Saracen uses his horse to nudge him away,
but Ruggiero side-steps so he can grab
the horse's reins and to Rodomonte's dismay
turn him around and then with his dagger stab
in the side and then in the thigh to make him pay
for what he'd done. Each was only a jab
but there could be no doubt that he was bleeding—
a sign that Ruggiero might be succeeding.

- 127 Rodomonte is still holding the heavy hilt
and guard of his sword and he uses it to pound
on Ruggiero's helmet. (When you tilt
you use whatever's at hand.) It makes a sound
like a struck gong. Will Ruggiero wilt?
He staggers a moment but does not go down to the ground
again. He grabs the other's arms and pulls
him off his horse. (His strength is like a bull's.)
- 128 A little more luck and Ruggiero could then
have won—if Rodomonte hadn't landed
upright and on his feet. Most of the men
watching thought at this point that their man did
well and that his chances were good again.
On an even footing now, Ruggiero's hand did
not lack a sword, which is, as any knight
will tell you, a convenience in a fight.
- 129 Ruggiero sees the blood and makes a plan,
which is to stay away at least for a while
until his opponent weakens and he can
no longer fight well. It is a cautious style,
but the Saracen is a mountain of a man
and dangerous. A little wit or guile
have never been proscribed in such a case.
The thing is to win—and save one's ass and face.
- 130 Rodomonte's strategy is the opposite,
for he knows he isn't going to get any stronger,
and while he has strength, he should make use of it.
Therefore without delaying any longer
he slams Ruggiero's cheek guard with that bit
of hilt he has left, making a dismal clangor
and all but putting out Ruggiero's lights.
It's hard to predict what will happen in these fights.

131 Ruggiero totters and he appears to sway
from side to side. The other advances to
press his advantage but then his leg gives way
because of the wound in his thigh. What he wants to do
is clear enough, but his wound will have its say
and it rebels and will not follow through.
He falls then with one knee touching the dirt,
and everyone can see now that he is hurt.

132 This is Ruggiero's moment and he goes
after the Saracen hitting his breast and face
with blow after blow. How he survives, God knows,
but he does and even gets up again to embrace
Ruggiero in his iron grip. I suppose
it looks as though the two of them dance in place,
but it is a dance of death. Ruggiero searches
for any sign of weakness and he lurches

133 toward the side with the wounded leg and he
heaves and jerks, always using his brain
to exploit Rodomonte's vulnerability
and cause him from time to time unbearable pain.
But finding some reserve of strength that may be
derived not from the body but from the brain,
Rodomonte grapples with Ruggiero and shifts
his weight until at last the Saracen lifts

134 the other into the air for a moment but
he cannot endure this way and he lets him back
down. Ruggiero is very quick with his foot
and trips the pagan up. It is an attack
that wrestlers often use. (You never know what
will come in handy.) Rodomonte, like a sack
of potatoes, goes down—but our metaphorical spud
seldom discolors the turf with a flow of blood.

- 135 Ruggiero's worries are over. He has, as they say,
Fortune by the forelock. He also has
a dagger at the Saracen's eyes and may
strike at any moment. And then, as
a kind of insurance that Rodomonte stay
just where he is, the other arm is across
the Saracen's throat and, with his burly chest,
he presses down upon the pagan's breast.
- 136 I am told that there are gold mines off in Spain
where the greedy miners go down into their deep
tunnels in search of the shining metal. The main
danger they face is the tunnel's collapse that will keep
them down there forever, not only body and brain,
but even the soul trapped too, unable to creep
up into the air and at least the view
of heaven. Such was the weight the Saracen knew.
- 137 Ruggiero has the dagger at
Rodomonte's eyes, and he asks if he will yield.
He'd rather spare his life if it comes to that.
(And it has.) But the other's will is now revealed
by a violent shake of the head. In this combat
he'd rather die and let his fate be sealed
than be supposed a coward in the eyes
of the world, which he dismisses and defies.
- 138 Okay, it's a dogfight, and the Great Dane's jaws
are fixed in the throat of the mastiff that writhes and snaps
and tries to shake loose, and scratches with its claws,
but it cannot escape the teeth and cruel dewlaps
of the stronger beast. So Rodomonte's cause
is desperate as he tries to escape the traps
of Ruggiero's hold on him. At last
he frees a hand his opponent had held fast.

- 139 He works it around and with it draws his dirk
which is his last best chance. He tries to hit
Ruggiero in the back. And this could work
to do much damage if he could manage it.
How do you spare a man who has gone berserk?
If he cannot persuade Rodomonte to submit,
he cannot let him live. He tried, Lord knows,
but this is a wild beast in its death throes.
- 140 He strikes and strikes again into the face
of the man with all the strength he can command.
The straining body relaxes. The last trace
of life ebbs out upon the gory sand.
The disdainful spirit goes to its proper place,
Acheron's foul banks and the gloomy land
of those who blasphemed and were full of pride
and arrogance until the day they died.

PRO BONO MALUM

Glossary of Names

- Abergavenny*, fief of Herman, at the English muster: X 82
- Achilles*, Greek hero at Troy: XXIX 19
- Acteon*, huntsman who saw Diana naked, was changed into a stag, and was devoured by his own dogs: XI 58
- Adonis*, a youth loved by Venus: VII 57
- Aeneas*, Trojan hero who loved and abandoned Dido and then founded Rome: XIX 35
- Aeolus*, wind god, son of Jupiter: X 70
- Agolant*, an African king, father of Almont and Troiano, and grandfather of Ruggiero and Marfisa: XII 44; XVII 14
- Agramant*, a king of Africa, son of Troiano, grandson of Agolant, and commander of the Saracen expedition against Charlemagne: I 1 and passim
- Agricolt*, African king of Amon: XVI 81
- Agrican*, King of Tartary and father of Mandricardo. To win Angelica's hand, he invaded Cathay but he was killed by Orlando: I 80 and passim
- Aigisthos*, Clytemnestra's lover, who killed Agamemnon and was later killed by Orestes: XXI 57
- Alardo*, eldest brother of Bradamante and Rinaldo: XXIII 22
- Alcabrun*, Scottish chieftain: X 85
- Alcina*, a sorceress, sister of Morgana and Logistilla. She ensnares Astolfo and Ruggiero on her island: VI 35ff.
- Aleria*, wife of Guidone Selvaggio, who escapes with him to France: XX 80
- Alessandra*, daughter of Queen Orontea, who is loved by Elbanio: XX 37
- Alfeo*, a physician and astrologer to Charlemagne: XVIII 174
- Alfonso d'Este*, son of Ercole I who was duke from 1505 to 1534: VII 62; XIV 2
- Almonio*, Scottish knight sent by Odorico to find horses: XIII 20
- Almont*, son of Agolant, who is killed by Orlando. Orlando took his helmet and sword (Durindana); with his brother Troiano, Almont killed Ruggiero's father (Ruggiero II of Reggio): I 28 and passim

Alteo, a Saracen killed by Lurcanio: XVIII 54
Alzirdo, king of Tremisen in Algeria: XII 72
Ambaldo, French soldier killed by Rodomonte: XIV 125
Amon, Duke of Dordogne, father of Rinaldo, Bradamante, and Ricciar-
 detto: I 12 and passim
Analaro, Count of Barcelona: XIV 16
Andronica, personification of Courage: XV 11
Andropono, a priest killed by Rodomonte: XIV 124
Andropono (2), a Greek slain by Cloridano: XVIII 177
Angelica, daughter of Galfrone, king of Cathay, and sister of Argalia; she is
 loved by both Rinaldo and Orlando: I 5 and passim
Angelini (Angelino of Bordeaux and Angelino of Bellanda): XV 9
Anglant, title of Milo, Orlando's father, and, by extension, of Orlando as
 well: VIII 63 and passim
Angoliero of Gascony, a champion of Charlemagne: XVI 17
Angus, the earldom of Lurcanio: X 86
Anne of Brittany, wife of Louis XII: XIII 71
Anselm of Flanders, killed at Paris, XIV 123
Anselmo of Altaripa, Count of Maganza, father of Pinabello: XXII 47;
 XXIII 4ff.
Anselmo of Stafford, killed by Dardinello: XVIII 47
Anteus, a giant, son of Neptune and Gea: IX 78; XXIII 85
Antony, Mark, Roman triumvir: VII 20; XV 31
Anubis, jackal-headed Egyptian god, son of Isis and Osiris: XV 58
Apollo (Phoebus), the sun god: XII 67
Aquilant, the Black, son of Oliver and brother of Grifon, the White: XV 67
 and passim
Arbante, son of Cimosco and, briefly, husband to a reluctant Olympia who
 kills him: IX 32ff.
Archidante, Count of Sagunto: XIV 16
Ardalico, son of the Count of Flanders, knighted by Charlemagne: XVIII
 180
Arethusa, a nymph: VI 20
Argalia, brother of Angelica whose soul claims the helmet of Ferrau: I 26;
 VIII 17 and passim
Arganio, king of Libya: XIV 18
Argeo, husband and victim of Gabrina: XXI 14
Argilon, a knight of Melibea, killed by Guidone: XX 7
Argo, the ship of Jason and the Argonauts that sailed to Colchis for the
 Golden Fleece: XIII 59

Argosto, king of Marmonda, deceased: XIV 18
Ariodante, an Italian knight at the court of Scotland, brother of Lurcanio and lover of Ginevra: V 17; XVI 55, 65; XVIII 56
Armano of Forbes, at the English muster: X 87
Arnaldo of Toulouse, French soldier killed by Rodomonte: XIV 125
Arnolfo, a Flemish duke killed by Rodomonte: XIV 122
Artalico, a Saracen killed by Ariodante: XVI 65
Artemia, female warrior of Alessandretta: XX 54
Arthur, King at Camelot: IV 52 and passim
Arundel, Count of, in the muster of English troops: X 80
Astolfo, an English paladin, son of Otho and cousin of Orlando and Rinaldo: VI 33 and passim
Atlas, sorcerer who raised Ruggiero and the infant Marfisa and who put up a magic castle to hide Ruggiero and keep him safe. IV 30 and passim
Atys, a youth whom Cybele loved: VII 57
Augustus (or Octavian), Roman emperor and patron of Virgil: XV 24
Aurora (or Dawn), young wife of aged Tithonus: X 20 and passim
Auster, the south wind: XXXVIII 29
Avalos, Alfonso d', Marquis of Vasto, one of Charles V's commanders against the French. Alfonso d'Este sent Ariosto to him as an envoy, and he gave Ariosto a pension: XV 26
Avalos, Francesco d', Marquis of Pescara, cousin of the above and also one of Charles V's commanders: XV 26
Avino, one of the paladins: XV 9; XVI 17; XVII 16; XVIII 9
Avolio, one of the paladins: XV 9; XVI 17; XVII 16; XVIII 8
Babel, the tower Nimrod built to assault God: XIV 118
Balastro, African King of Djerba: XIV 22; XVI 82; XVIII 45
Balinfronte, King of Cosca: XIV 25
Balisarda, Ruggiero's enchanted sword: VII 76 and passim
Baliverzo, an African king: XV 6; XVI 75
Balugante, a member of Marsilio's court: XIV 11
Bambirago, an African king: XIV 24; XV 82
Bardino, servant of King Monodante: XXXIX 41ff.
Baricondo, a Spanish leader: XIV 12
Bath, Bishop of, at the English muster: X 81
Bavarte, Spaniard in Marsilio's court: XIV 16
Beatrice, wife of Amon and mother of Rinaldo, Bradamante, Ricciardetto, and others: II 31; XXIII 24
Beatrice d'Este, daughter of Ercole I and wife of Ludovico Sforza: XIII

Beatrice d'Este (2), daughter of Aldobrandino, wife of Andrew of Hungary: XIII 63
Beatrice d'Este (3), daughter of Azzo VI, became a nun and was beatified: XIII 63
Beelzebub, a devil: IX 91
Berlengerio, one of the paladins: XV 9; XVII 16; XVIII 9
Bianca Maria, daughter of Alfonso of Aragon, wife of Lionello d'Este: XIII 72
Bireno, Duke of Zeeland who marries and then abandons Olympe: IX 25ff.; XI 63ff.
Boiardo, Matteo Maria, Count of Scandiano, author of *Orlando Innamorato*, of which Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is a continuation: XVIII 109
Borgia, Lucrezia, daughter of Pope Alexander VI and wife of Alfonso d'Este: XIII 68
Bradamante, maiden warrior, daughter of Amon and Beatrice and sister of Rinaldo. She marries Ruggiero and with him is the founder of the house of Este: II 70 and passim
Brandimart, converted to Christianity by Orlando, and his most faithful friend. He is the lover of Fiordiligi: VIII 86 and passim
Briareus, a giant with a hundred arms who fought in the rebellion of the titans: VI 67
Brigliadoro, Orlando's steed: VIII 84 and passim
Brunello, a thief in Agramant's employ. He steals Angelica's ring and as a reward gets the throne of Tangiers. IV 2 and passim
Buchan, earl of, in the muster of British troops: X 86
Buckingham, duke of, in the muster of British troops: X 82
Burardo, an African king: XIV 18
Caesar, Julius, Roman emperor: VII 59
Caico, an African king: XIV 25
Calabrun, king of Aragon, killed by Orlando: XVI 60
Calamidor, son of Calabrun, trampled to death by Duke Trasone's horse: XVI 60
Caligorant, robber giant of the Nile: XV 51
Camilla, a princess who fought with Turnus against Aeneas: XX 1
Casimiro, a Spanish soldier: XVI 65
Celano, Countess of, wife of Azzo VI d'Este: XIII 73
Ceres, daughter of Cybele and goddess of the harvest: XII 1
Charlemagne, King and Emperor of France, Holy Roman Emperor, and the focus of Carolingian epics: I 1 and passim
Chelindo, bastard son of King Calabrun of Aragon: XVI 60
Chiarello, a knight killed by Rinaldo: XX 6

- Cimosco*, king of Frisia who invades Holland; he is killed by Orlando: IX 42; XI 21
- Clarence*, Henry, Duke of, at the British muster: X 78
- Clarindo*, an African king: XIV 26, 113
- Claudio* of the Forest, killed by Dardinello: XVIII 47
- Claudio* of Tours, killed by Rodomonte at Paris: XIV 125
- Cleopatra*, queen of Egypt: VII 20; X 56
- Clermont*, the family to which Orlando and Rinaldo belong; their fathers, Milo and Amon, are brothers; the Maganzese are their enemies: II 67 and passim
- Cloridano*, an African soldier who tries to help Medoro bury Dardinello's corpse: XVIII 165ff.
- Cloris*, the goddess Flora, loved by Zephyr: XV 57
- Clotho*, one of the three Fates, who spins the thread of human lives: X 56; XXXIV 89
- Clytemnestra*, wife and murderer of Agamemnon: XX 13
- Conrad*, a German soldier in Charlemagne's army, killed by Rodomonte: XVIII 177
- Constantine*, Roman emperor: XXX 80
- Corebo* of Bilbao, a friend to Odorico but loyal to Zerbino: XIII 22
- Corimbo* of Apamia, at Norandino's tourney: XVII 96
- Corineo*, an African king: XIV 24; XV 6
- Corinna*, Greek poet from Boeotia, 6th century B.C.: XX 1
- Cortez*, Hernando, conqueror of Mexico for Charles V: XV 27
- Creon*, tyrant of Thebes who forbade Antigone to bury her brother Polynices: XIX 11
- Cumaeen Sibyl*, a prophetess who lived a thousand years: VII 73; XIX 66
- Cupid*, little mischievous god of love: XXXIX 61
- Cygnus*, a friend of Phaeton who grieved at his death and was turned into a swan: XXIX 19
- Dalinda*, lady in waiting to Guinevere, the Scottish princess: V 22, 73ff.
- Dardinello*, son of Almont, killed by Rinaldo, and buried by Medoro and Angelica: XIV 29ff.
- Death* (personified): XXXIV 89
- Denis* of Tours, killed by Rodomonte at Paris: XIV 125
- Derby*, Earl of, at the British muster: X 81
- Desmond*, Earl of, at the British muster: X 87
- Devon*, Raymond, Count of, at the English muster: X 81
- Diana*, chaste goddess of the hunt: I 52; XI 58
- Dicilla*, personification of Justice, an attendant of Logistilla: X 52
- Dido*, Queen of Carthage abandoned by Aeneas: X 56; XIX 35

Discord, summoned by Michael the Archangel to disrupt the Saracen camp: XIV 75; XVIII 26ff.

Domitian, a cruel Roman emperor: XVII 2

Doralice, daughter of Stordilano, engaged to Rodomonte: XIV 50 and passim

Dorchin, Saracen soldier killed by Lurcanio: XVIII 54

Doria, Andrea, admiral from Genoa who switched from the French to the Spanish side: XV 28ff.

Doriconte, a member of Marsilio's court: XIV 16

Dorifedo, King of Catalonia: XIV 10

Dorilon, African King of Ceuta: XIV 23

Dorset, Earl of, at the English muster: X 80

Dragontina, sorceress who imprisoned Orlando: XI 4

Dudone, a paladin who fought with a club, son of Ogier the Dane: VI 41 and passim

Dudrinasso, deceased king of Libya: XIV 19

Durindana, Orlando's sword, originally used by Hector at Troy, now embedded in a stone wall at the fortified church of Rocamadour in France: IX 4 and passim

Edward, Earl of Shrewsbury, at the English muster: X 82

Elbanio, the knight loved by Alexandra, Queen Orontea's daughter: XX 36

Elijah, the prophet who ascended into Heaven in a fiery chariot: XXX 58, 68

Endymion, a shepherd loved by Selene, the goddess of the moon: XVIII 185

Enoch, son of Cain, ascended into Heaven while still living: XXX 58

Eraclio, an emperor of the Greeks: XXI 13

Erifilla, personification of Greed, defeated by Ruggiero: VI 78; VII 2

Ermant, Duke of Somerset, at the English muster: X 81

Erroll, Earl of, at the English muster: X 86

Essex, Earl of, at the English muster: X 79

Etearco, a Spanish soldier: XVI 65

Eve, the first woman, victim of Satan: XI 22; XXX 60

Ezzelino da Romano, tyrant killed by Azzo d'Este: XVII 3

Falsirone, father of Ferrau, brother of Marsilio: XIV 11

Farurant, king of Mauretania in Africa: XIV 21; XVI 75

Ferrau, nephew of Marsilio, in love with Angelica: I 14 and passim

Fieramont, Duke of York, at the English muster: X 78; XVI 67

Finadurro, African king leading troops of Morocco and the Canary Islands: XIV 22

Fiordiligi, lover then wife of Brandimart, converted to Christianity by Rinaldo: VIII 88, 90; XXIX 43ff.; XXXIX 39ff.
Foix, Gaston de, nephew of Louis XII of France, who won the battle of Ravenna: XIV 6
Follicon of Almeria, illegitimate son of Marsilio: XIV 16
Folvirante, King of Navarre, killed by Rinaldo: XIV 10
Fortune (personified): XXX 74, XXXIV 90; XLVI 135
Fronesia, an attendant of Logistilla, personifying Prudence: X 52
Frontino, Ruggiero's horse: IV 46 and passim
Fusberta, Rinaldo's sword: II 10; XVI 49
Galafron, Khan of Cathay and father of Argalia and Angelica: VIII 43; XII 35
Galahad, a knight of Arthur's Round Table: IV 52
Galatea, shepherdess in Virgil's *Eclogues*: XI 12
Ganymede, a youth abducted from Mt. Ida by an eagle to be a cup-bearer to Jupiter: IV 47
Garbina, evil crone: XXI 50 and passim
Gardo, a Saracen killed by Lurcanio: XVIII 54
Gawain, a knight of Arthur's Round Table: IV 52
George, Saint, slayer of the dragon: XV 97
Gismonda, mother of Grifon and Aquilant: XV 73
Gloucester, Oldrade, Duke of, at the English muster: X 78
Godfrey, Duke of Buckingham, at the English muster: X 82
Gonzaga, Francesco II, married to Isabella d'Este: XIII 58
Gradasso, King of Sericana, II 45 and passim
Grandonio of Volterra, Spaniard in command of troops of Algarve: XIV 11
Grifon, the White, twin brother of Aquilant the Black, sons of Oliver: XV 67 and passim
Grillo, a drunkard, XVIII 176
Gualciotto, deceased King of Bellamarina: XIV 27
Gualtiero, French soldier killed by Rodomonte: XIV 125
Guidi, Guido of Bourgogne and Guido of Montfort, both paladins: XV 9; XVI 17
Guidon Selvaggio, son of Amon and half-brother of Rinaldo: XXII 52ff.
Guinevere, daughter of the King of Scotland and sister of Zerbino: IV 60
Hadrian, Roman emperor: XXIX 31
Haramon of Corwall, killed by Dardinello: XVIII 52
Harpalyce, an Amazon praised in Virgil's *Aeneid*: XX 1
Hector, the Trojan hero; his arms, made by Vulcan, are owned by Mandricardo, but his sword was won by Orlando: XIV 34 and passim

Hecuba, mother of Hector and widow of Priam: VII 73; X 34
Helen of Troy, wife of Menelaus, kidnapped by Paris and brought to Troy:
 X 3
Henry, Duke of Clarence, at the English muster: X 78
Henry, Earl of Salisbury, at the English muster: X 82
Hermit (1), the sorcerer met by Angelica: II 12; VIII 28ff.; (2), who warns
 Astolfo against Caligorant: XV 42; (3), who escorts Isabella with
 Zerbino's corpse: XXIX 8
Hermonide of Holland, wounded by Zerbino while trying for vengeance
 against Gabrina: XXI 5
Hilarion, an early hermit of Palestine: VIII 45
Hippalca, servant of Bradamante: XXIII 29ff.
Hippogryph, Ariosto's invention, an animal with a horse's body and a grif-
 fin's head, chest, and feathers; tamed by Atlas: IV 33 and passim
Horatius, the Roman hero at the bridge: XVIII 65
Hugo of Tours, killed at Paris by Rodomonte: XIV 125
Idomeneo, King of Crete who killed his own son to fulfill a vow to Neptune:
 XX 14
Ino, a woman who threw herself into the sea in grief for the death of her
 son Learchus and was changed to a sea-nymph: XI 43
Ippolito d'Este, son of Ercole I, elevated to Cardinal at the age of 14, the
 poet's patron: I 3; VII 62
Iroldo, a Christian knight captured by Atlas: IV 40; XXII 20
Isabella, princess of Galicia and lover of Zerbino: XIII 4 and passim
Isabella d'Este, daughter of Ercole I, sister of Alfonso and Ippolito: XIII 57,
 67
Isoliero of Pamplona, brother of Ferrau, in command of the troops of Na-
 varre: XIV 10, 20; XVI 55
Ivo, one of Charlemagne's barons: XVIII 10
Jealousy (personified), an ally of Discord: XVIII 28, 30
Jesus Christ: XXXIV 61; XXXVIII 33, 71
John, the Evangelist: XXXIV 57, 62; XXXVIII 29; XXXIX 25, 45
Jove (also Jupiter), king of the Olympian gods: II 8
Judas, betrayer of Christ, in the depths of Dante's Hell: XI 27
Juno, wife of Jupiter, XI 71
Kent, Duke of, at the English muster: X 79
Kildare, Earl of, at the English muster: X 87
Labretto, Duke of, serving with Charlemagne: XVIII 179
Lamirante, Spaniard in Marsilio's court: XIV 16
Lancaster, Duke of, Lionetto, at the English muster: X 77
Lancelot, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table: IV 52
Lanfusa, mother of Ferrau: XXV 74

Langirhan, a Spaniard in Marsilio's court: XIV 16
Larbin, King of Portugal, killed by Rinaldo: XIV 12
Largalifa, a Spaniard in Marsilio's court: XIV 16; XVIII 44
Leo I, Pope, Giovanni de' Medici: XVII 79
Libanio, African king: XIV 22
Lionetto, Duke of Lancaster, King Otho's nephew: X 77; XVI 40; XVII 155
Logistilla, a good sorceress, with evil sisters Alcina and Morgana: VI 45 and passim
Louis XII of France, invader of Italy, and father of Renée who married Ercole II d'Este: XIII 71; XIV 7, 9
Lucina, daughter of the King of Cyprus, bride of King Norandino of Syria, and a victim of Orcus: XVII 25; XVIII 93, 140
Ludovico Il Moro, Sforza, Duke of Milan, married to Beatrice d'Este: XIII 62
Luigi from Provence, cut in two by Rodomonte at Paris: XIV 125
Lurcanio, Italian knight and brother of Ariodante: IV 57 and passim
Lydia, daughter of the King of Lydia: XXXIV 44
Madarasso, King of Andalusia, XIV 11; XVII 157
Maganza, a family with whom the house of Clermont are bitter enemies: II 58 and passim
Malabuferso, King of Fez: XIV 23; XV 7; XVI 76
Malagigi, son of Buovo, brother of Viviano, cousin of Rinaldo: XI 4 and passim
Malagur, a Spaniard in Marsilio's court: XIV 16
Malgarino, a Spaniard in Marsilio's guard: XIV 15
Malindo of Flanders, brother of Ardalico, serving with Charlemagne: XVIII 180
Malzarise, a Spaniard in Marsilio's guard: XIV 15
Mambrino, a knight killed by Rinaldo, who took his helmet: I 28; XX 6; XXXVIII 79
Mandricardo, son of Agrican, King of Tartary, and a fierce Saracen champion: XIV 33 and passim
Manildardo, King of Norizia: XII 72, 80; XIV 31; XXIII 71
Mar, Trasone, Duke of, at the English muster: X 85; XVI 66
Martasin, a Spaniard killed by Bradamante: XIV 17
March, Earl of, at the English muster: X 80
Marco of Mont St. Michel, in Charlemagne's guard at Paris: XVIII 10
Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor: XV 24
Marfisa, Saracen damsel warrior and, as it turns out, the sister of Ruggiero: XXVI 8 and passim
Margano, a Saracen soldier: XVI 65

Maricoldo, King of Galicia, killed by Orlando: XIV 13
Marius, Roman general and dictator: XVII 2
Mars, god of War, XV 56 and passim
Marsilio, King of Spain and Charlemagne's brother-in-law, but on Agramant's side in the invasion of France: I 5 and passim
Martano of Antioch, Orrigilla's lover: XV 85ff.
Martasin, African king of the Garamants: XIV 17
Matalista, Spanish commander: XIV 13
Matteo of Mont St. Michel, in Charlemagne's guard at Paris: XVIII 10
Maximinus, evil Roman emperor: XVII 2
Medea, helped Jason on his quest for the golden fleece and then killed their two sons when he abandoned her: XX 42; XXI 56
Medoro, soldier in the service of King Dardinello, whose corpse he is trying to bury: XVIII 165ff.; XXXI 59ff.
Melicerta, son of Athamas and Ino, who saved him from his father's fury by jumping into the sea: XI 43
Melissa, Mantuan sorceress in Merlin's cave: VII 38 and passim
Mercury, messenger of the Gods: XV 57
Merlin, British sorcerer: III 60; VII 37 and passim
Michael, Archangel, sent by Heaven to bring Silence and Discord to help Charlemagne: XIV 74; XV 48; XVIII 26
Minerva (or Pallas, or Athena), goddess of wisdom and weaving and patroness of Athens: XI 75
Minos, King of Crete and judge in the Underworld: XX 25
Mirabaldo, formerly king of Bolga in Africa: XIV 26
Monodante, father of Brandimart and Ziliante: XXXIX 40
Morando, enemy of Argeo: XXI 36
Moratto, leader of Scandinavian troops helping Charlemagne: X 89
Morgana, sorceress, sister of Alcina and Logistilla: VI 38 and passim
Morgante, one of Marsilio's leaders: XIV 15
Moschino, a defender of Paris: XIV 124
Mosco, bastard son of King Calabrun of Aragon: XVI 60
Namo, Duke of Bavaria, Charlemagne's childhood friend and, in adulthood, his most trusted adviser: I 8 and passim
Nature (personified): XXXIV 89
Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon: XXXIV 65
Neiera, a shepherdess in Virgil's *Eclagues*: XI 12
Neptune, god of the sea: XI 42; XV 18; XXIX 19
Nereids, sea nymphs, daughters of Nereus: XI 43
Nero, evil Roman emperor: XVII 1

Nimrod, builder of the Tower of Babel and Rodomonte's ancestor: XIV
 119
Ninus, King of Assyria, husband of Semiramis: VII 20
Norandino, King of Syria, married to Lucina: XVIII 3, 59ff.; XIX 77
Norfolk, Duke of, at the English muster: X 79
Northumberland, Earl of, at the English muster: X 79
Oberto, French soldier killed at Paris by Rodomonte: XIV 125
Octavius, one of the triumvirate who later became Augustus Caesar: XV 31
Odo, a Parisian soldier: XIV 125
Odorico of Biscay, a friend and then a betrayer of Zerbino: XIII 11; XXIV
 84
Ogier the Dane, father of Dudone and a paladin: XVIII 8; XXXVIII 79;
 XXXXVI 110
Oldrade (1), Duke of Gloucester: X 78; XVI 67; (2), of Flanders, killed at
 Paris by Rodomonte: XIV 123
Oldrado, Duke of Gloucester, at the English muster: X 78; XVI 67
Olimpio dalla Serra, a Spanish soldier: XVI 71
Oliver, Orlando's close friend and the father of Grifone and Aquilant: XV
 67 and passim
Olympia, daughter of the Count of Holland, twice rescued by Orlando and
 finally married to Hubert, King of Hibernia: IX 84ff.; XI 54, 67ff.
Ombruno, a challenger at Norandino's tourney: XVII 87
Orco, the sea monster that devours maidens near Ebuda: XVII 29ff.
Orestes, son of Clytemnestra, whom he kills with her lover, Aigisthos: XXI
 57
Orghetto of Maganza, killed by Rodomonte at Paris: XIV 123
Orlando, a paladin and the eponymous hero of the poem: I 2 and passim
Ormida, an African king: XIV 18, 113
Orontea, founder of the regime of the killer women: XX 25, 47
Orrigilla, a treacherous beauty who gets Grifone in trouble: XV 100 and
 passim
Orrilo, an Egyptian killed by Astolfo: XV 66; XVIII 122
Otho, King of England, father of Astolfo: VIII 26; XXII 8
Otto, one of the paladins: XV 9; XVI 7; XVII 16; XVIII 8
Oxford, Earl of, at the English muster: X 81
Palidón of Moncalieri, killed by Cloridano: XVIII 175
Paris, Trojan prince who abducts Helen: XI 69
Paul, an early hermit and a model of sanctity: VIII 45
Pembroke, Earl of, at the English muster: X 79
Penelope, wife of Ulysses: XIII 58

Peter, Saint, holder of the keys to Heaven: XXII 2; XXXIV 58
Phalanto, bastard son of Clytemnestra and founder of Taranto: XX 14
Pharaoh, Moses' adversary: XV 39
Phidias, Greek sculptor of the 5th century B.C.: XI 69
Philander, seduced and then killed by Gabrina: XXI 26
Phryxus, brother of Helle; they were saved by the Golden Ram who carried them off but dropped Helle into what is now the Hellespont: XI 82
Phyllis, a shepherdess in Virgil's *Eclogues*: XI 12
Pinabello of Maganza, son of Anselm of Altaripa and a crooked vassal of Charlemagne: II 58; XX IIIff.
Pinodoro, King of Constantine, killed by Ruggiero: XIV 22
Pinamont, a Londoner killed by Dardinello: XVIII 47
Polynesso, Duke of Albany and Lord High Constable to the King of Scotland: V 6ff.
Pompey, Roman triumvir and admiral, defeated by Caesar at Pharsalus: XV 29
Prando the Norman, killed by Rodomonte at Paris: XIV 123
Prasildo, a knight captured by Atlas: IV 40
Pride (personified), an ally of Discord: XVIII 27, 28
Procne, sister of Philomena and wife of King Tereus, she killed their son and served him to Tereus; she was turned into a swallow: XXI 56
Proserpina, daughter of Ceres, carried down to the Underworld by Pluto: XII 1
Proteus, shepherd of Neptune's sea flocks: VIII 52; XI 42
Prusione, an African king: XIV 27; XV 7; XVI 81
Puliano, an African king: XIV 23, 109; XVI 44
Pythagoras, Greek philosopher: XIV 85
Rabican, Astolfo's steed, formerly Argalia's: VII 77 and passim
Raymond, Count of Devon, at the English muster: X 81
Raymond, a Londoner killed by Dardinello: XVIII 47
Renata of France, daughter of Louis XII and Anne of Brittany, wife of Ercole II d'Este: XIII 71
Ricardo, Earl of Warwick, at the English muster: X 78; XVI 67; XVIII 10
Ricciarda, wife of Niccolò d'Este: XIII 66
Ricciardetto, twin brother of Bradamante and lover of Fiordispina: XXXVI 12
Richmond, Earl of, at the English muster: X 80
Rinaldo, son of Amon and Beatrice, and mainstay of the house of Clermont; with his cousin Orlando, chief paladin of Charlemagne: I 8 and passim
Rodomonte: King of Algiers, and a descendant of Nimrod, the leading champion of the Saracens, betrothed to Doralice: XIV 27 and passim

Ross, duchy of Zerbino, with this title at the English muster: X 84
Ruggiero of Reggio, father of the hero Ruggiero and of Marfisa, betrayed by his brother Bertram, and murdered by Almont and Troiano, his wife's brothers: II 32
Ruggiero, son of the above, a descendant of Hector of Troy and ancestor of the house of Este, in love with Bradamante: I 4 and passim
Rumor, enemy of Silence: XVIII 96; XXII 93
Sacripant, Saracen King of Circassia, in love with Angelica: I 45 and passim
Salamon, King of Brittany, a paladin: XV 9; XVIII 10; XXXVIII 80
Salinterno, Norandino's champion at the tournament in Damascus: XVII 97
Salisbury, a fief of Henry, at the English muster: X 82
Samson, Hebrew champion who killed the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass: XIV 47; XXXIV 63
Sansonetto, King of Persia, converted to Christianity by Orlando, and now Charlemagne's regent in Jerusalem: XV 95 and passim
Sappho, 4th century B.C. Greek poet: XX 1
Scipio, Roman general who defeated Hannibal: VII 59
Serpentino, successor to Maricoldo: XIV 13
Sforza, the ducal family of Milan: XIII 61
Shrewsbury, fief of Edward, at the English muster: X 82
Sidon, Baron of, in Norandino's tournament: XVII 93
Silence, fetched by Michael to conceal the arrival of English reinforcements: XIV 75ff.; XVI 42
Silenus, father of the satyrs and a god of drunkenness: XXXIX 60
Sinagon, King of Calatrava, killed by Oliver: XIV 13
Sobriño, King of Garbo and Agramant's most trusted counselor: XIV 26 and passim
Sofrosina, personification of Temperance and an attendant to Logistilla: X 52; XV 11
Somerset, duchy of Harriman, at the English muster: X 81
Soridano, African king: XIV 22, 113; XVI 75, 81
Spineloccio, the Norman, killed at Paris: XIV 123
Stordilano, King of Granada, father of Doralice: XIV 12, 56, 114
Strafford, Duke of, at the English muster: X 85
Suffolk, Duke of, at the English muster: X 79
Sulla, a Roman dictator: XVII 2
Sylvester I, Pope, recipient of the Donation of Constantine: XXXIV 80
Tanfirion, an African king: XIV 25
Tardooco, deceased king of Djerba: XIV 24
Tesira, King of Portugal: XIV 12; XVIII 157

Tiberius, wicked Roman emperor: XVII 2
Tiphys, helmsman of the Argo: XIII 59
Tirse of Apamia, at Norandino's tourney: XVII 96
Tithonus, husband of Aurora; by marrying her he obtained immortality but not eternal youth: XI 31
Trajan, Roman emperor: XV 24, 40
Trasone, Duke of Mar, at the English muster: X 84; XVI 55, 64
Trickery (personified): XIV 86
Tritons, creatures ridden by sea sprites; they are half-man and half-fish: XI 43
Trivulzio, Gian Giacomo, Milanese commander whom Louis XII made Marshal: XIV 9
Troiano, father of Agramant: I 1; XII 31; XVII 14
Turpin, Archbishop of Rheims, who accompanied Charlemagne to Spain and to whom a *Life of Charlemagne* is attributed: XIII 38 and passim
Uberto of Mirford, killed by Dardinello: XVIII 47
Ughetto of Dordogne, one of Charlemagne's barons: XVIII 12
Ulysses, hero of the *Odyssey* and the Latin name for Odysseus: XIII 58
Venus, Roman goddess of beauty and love: XI 70; XV 56; XVIII 136
Virgil, Roman poet, author of the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*: XXXIV 60
Visconti, ducal family of Milan with close ties to the house of Este: XIII 61
Vulcan, Roman god of fire and blacksmith of the gods, who made Hector's armor: II 8; XII 2; XV 56; XXVI 100
Wales, Prince of, regent in the absence of the English king: VIII 27
William of Burnich, killed by Dardinello: XVIII 52
Xenocrates, a disciple of Plato famous for his austerity: XI 3
Xerxes, King of Persia who led the expedition against the Greeks: XX 3
York, Fieramonte, Duke of, at the English muster: X 78; XVI 67
Zerbino, son of the King of Scotland and brother of Guinevere: V 68 and passim
Zeuxis, 4th century B.C. Greek painter: XI 71
Ziliante, son of King Monodante and brother of Brandimart: XIX 38