

Torquato Tasso

RINALDO



Tintoretto, *Gentleman in Armor* (ca. 1550), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

Translated from the Italian by

Max Wickert

In 1560, when Tasso was barely sixteen, he entered the University of Padua. He had already begun an epic on the First Crusade, the first germ of his masterpiece, *Gerusalemme liberata*. But he put that project aside after one canto and within a year was busy with *Rinaldo*, a chivalric epic in twelve cantos. He worked with astonishing speed and finished the entire 7624-line poem in just under ten months. It was published at Venice in 1562 and proved quite successful, although it was of course completely eclipsed when the *Gerusalemme* appeared two decades later.

There has been only one previous English translation of this poem, by John Hoole in the late 18th century. I began work on mine after the acceptance of my version of *Gerusalemme liberata* by Oxford University Press. Here are the first three cantos.

Torquato Tasso

RINALDO

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CANTO ONE

1

I sing of the sweet joys and youthful fire

 Rinaldo as a lad was made to bear,

and how Love's ardor and his great desire

 for glory drew him into Error's snare,

in times when Charlemagne made the Moors retire,

 whose force proved feeble, much as they might dare;

 and Troyan, Anglant and the fierce Almont

 lay dead on battlefields in Aspramont*.

2

O Muse*, whose rustic style in days gone by

 aided my humble song and fed my flame,

until the woods attentive to my cry

 heard Echo* ring out the beloved name:

now that my mind seeks grander themes¹, and I

 gird up its powers, high exploits to proclaim,

 augment your favor, and with no less great

 success help it to bear the double weight.

3

Some day perhaps I'll dare to deck my rhyme

 with great Luigi d'Este's proud device²,

whence, by his valor, in all future time

our name shall everywhere delight men's eyes;
not that I deem mere human art can climb
those heights and his great worth imparadise,
for his renown in others is displayed
and he soars heavenward without earthly aid.

4

You, Reverend Lord, your head with purple crowned³.

your heart with virtue's palm, whose face
scatters such generous rays that all around
the brightest lights, eclipsed, leave scarce a trace,
when musing in your cell on thoughts profound,
upon my song bestow your welcome grace.

There you may see your high worth and your glory
dimly foreshadowed in another's story.

5

But when your brow shall bear by the Triple Crown,
when impious heresy cowers at your sight,
when, moved by sacred Love, your holy frown
shall make Christ's princes against Egypt fight,
and the fell Turk, confounded and cast down,
yield his ill-gotten conquest⁴ to your might,
my trumpet, not my lyre, may proclaim,
in ampler song your deeds and martial fame.

6

Already Charlemagne in many a fray

had crushed the African and made him yield,

and by brave Roland's exploits Almont lay

slain with his brother Troyan in the field;

but still the ill-starred pagans barred the way,

in many a castle or strong fort concealed

that inland or upon the shore they won

in times when the great conflict had begun.

7

But Charles, now once more master of the plain,

supplied by sea from both the east and west,

with his armed bands, time after time again

from various sides the Saracen forces pressed,

who, finding ample cause for fear, in pain

and rage saw Fate strike at the pagan crest;

indeed, his high, audacious spirit froze

with shock and awe the hearts all his foes.

8

Yet day by day their venturing sallies rolled

down from their ramparts or their walls to try

whether a Moor or Frank could be more bold,

at least in private duel; and, by and by,

when the bright sun concealed his locks of gold

and night's black pinions covered up the sky,

they in a mass assailed our camp to crown

by some success their glory and renown.

9

But ever the first honor, the first boast,

be it in general fray or single fight

was young Orlando's, who, always foremost,

rivaled the ancient heroes in his might:

no man there was so fierce in all that host,

no mail or armor charmed by magic sleight

safe from his valor; Mars* himself might yield

if he should meet him in the open field.

10

Oh how, time after time, he all alone

took on a thousand knights and drove them back!

How often, too, the ground below him shone

as Moorish blood ruddied its loamy black!

How he made Anglant's wretched followers groan

in grief's extremity at his attack,

who saw him piling up in blood-drenched mounts

the trunks of their most famous dukes and counts!

11

Soon eager Fame throughout the world extolled

his sovereign valor and his every deed.

(Though young at first, she soon grows old,

and gathers day by day in force and speed.)

Wherever she came her rumors loudly rolled

of his great merits that all hopes exceed:

she mingles truth with fiction as she leaps

from ear to ear, and never rests or sleeps.

12

And racing through the world, she comes to find

good Aymon's son, and one by one makes rise

his cousin's deeds that leave all praise behind,

his victories in every enterprise,

and thus in that magnanimous youth, whose mind

is set on glory as the highest prize,

kindles his generous heart with envy's glow,

for only noble hearts can envy so.

13

That envy burns the more, since, to his mind,

the flower of his green age passed away,

when among weaponed bands a man should find

hardship and glory in the martial fray,

while he at ease, on a soft couch reclined,

wrapped in soft garments, lingered day by day,
like some weak girl who in her pleasant bower
with needle and distaff plies her feeble power.

14

Racked by such cares he weeps, and deep groans came
heaving up from his heart. He fears his base
and slothful life has marked him out for shame,
so that a crimson blush overspreads his face.
He thinks men point at him, that at his name
tongues without number whisper of disgrace,
and that the blaze of glorious fame that shone
upon his brothers' deeds blotted his own.

15

Such were the thoughts that racked his bosom while,
turning his back upon the royal rooftops, he
left Paris, where he kept his domicile
together with his mother. Presently,
having proceeded no more than a mile
or two, he lifted up his gaze to see
a spacious, flower-strewn and hidden glade
ringed with dense trees that cast a pleasant shade.

16

There, since the place seemed apt for groans and sighs,

not fearing to be seen, he stopped to mourn
and languidly, tears welling in his eyes,
spoke thus, in accents dolorous and forlorn:
“Ah, why does not a living fire rise
of endless sorrow, mixed with shame and scorn,
to burn me into ash so that no word
of me may ever, for good or ill, be heard?”

17

“For I do nothing that could bring me praise,
or gain me glory, or achieve renown;
I win no prize and scale no heights to raise
me from obscurity that drags me down.
I am not a man who confidently weighs
his worth, or even his fortune, but a clown
despised by heaven, and the basest knight
on whom the sun bestows his burning light.”

18

“Ah why at least did not my fate allot
some lowly state to me, some unknown sire,
or make me a weak woman, so as not
to be defiled by infamy so dire;
for in a man illustriously begot,
and born of noble parentage, the mire
of vileness doubles, made more hideous by

the gentle blood that raises him on high.

19

“How little of my elder brothers’ worth
and dauntless valor my deservings show;
how much Orlando, our next of kin by birth,
in his high prowess lays my honors low.
He, sheathed in fine steel, even now rides forth
to batter and strike down the haughty foe,
and with his blade’s indomitable might
puts the proud African to humble flight.

20

“I, as if born to luxury and ease,
waste all my hours in a gilded cage,
and in soft featherbeds and palaces
sleep soundly, all unhurt and safe from rage,
and, shunning martial toil like some disease,
wait to grow strong and reach a riper age,
by a mother’s care and comforts kept apart
in sloth unworthy of a manly heart.”

21

While thus he spoke and wept and sighed
he heard a loud neigh nearby suddenly.
Rinaldo checked his tongue then, stupefied,
and, turning quickly, is surprised to see
a mighty courser by the bridle tied
to the gnarled trunk of an old walnut-tree.
Chewing the bit, impatient to be bound,
he wheels, tossing his mane, and stamps the ground.

22

On the same trunk a suit of armor hung,
adorned with gems and shining with bright gold,

which seems of adamant temper, tough and strong,
worked by a master's hand in days of old.
A stag that burns with thirst and finds among
the rocks a spring of water sweet and cold,
or a lover who chances, with a sudden start,
upon the face that has enslaved his heart,

23

was not so overjoyed as now the knight
who saw a broad path opening in this wise
to move from thoughts of fighting to the fight,
with the arms he dreamt of right before his eyes.
Toward that steed he hastens in delight,
who chews the bit with foaming mouth, unties
his bridle, leads him towards the track,
and, scorning stirrups, leaps upon his back.

24

But first the arms, that on the tree's trunk shone
like trophies sacred to great Mars*, he took
and decked his body with them one by one,
amazed with joy and grateful for his luck;
and he grows certain that for him alone
whoever made them plied his skill, for (look!)
he finds the parts so molded to each limb
that they seem forged by Vulcan* just for him.

25

And next to them a great escutcheon hung
on which a spotted leopard was displayed
whose mottled pelt and cruel gaze and tongue
made all that saw it faint-heart and afraid:
With blood-stained muzzle and sharp claws it sprung,
paws rampant, as if to an ambushade.

And this device, which he acquired there,
did many of his grandsons later bear⁵.

26

Then, having leapt upon that strong destrier,
sheathed head to toe in shining armor, he
a hauberk, golden shield and other gear
discovered shimmering beneath the tree,
and swiftly grasped the great lance lying near,
destined to wound so many grievously;
but left the sword, because a solemn vow,
made long before, strikes his remembrance now.

27

He had, in Charles' princely presence made
by way of vaunt a sacred pledge (when he,
with his two brothers was by him arrayed
in all the signs of noble chivalry
and dubbed a knight) never to wield a blade,
no matter how extreme the peril be,
unless he first by main force seized it from
a famous warrior he had overcome.

28

Now, like a man for bold adventure bound,
bent upon glory, welcoming the chance
to wreak his will, he turns his steed around,
applies the whip and spur, and makes it prance;
his generous scorn and wrath, and his profound
need for some test in which to try his lance,
so haste him on his way and fire his mind,
he soon leaves that small forest far behind.

29

As a brood-mare in March is wont to range,

impelled by lusty heat to nature's goal,
bolting unchecked from pasture or from grange,
 overleaping walls and streams without control,
so now the youth, who feels a new and strange
 foretaste of honor well up in his soul,
 roams everywhere and with redoubled speed
 past fields and woods and mountains spurs his steed,

30

till, as the hour when the plowman will
 unyoke his team and turn to rest draws near,
and the sun averts his face from us to fill
 with his fair beams the other hemisphere,
he reaches Arden*, for the changeless will
 of Destiny directs and drives him here;
 here fresh desire makes his spirit soar
 even beyond the heights it climbed before.

31

All night he rode; and when Aurora*'s glow began
 to show the new day borne upon her breast,
he met a venerable, ancient man,
 his brow by countless wrinkling lines impressed,
who, leaning on a stick, moved span by span
 his faint limbs, pausing at each step to rest.
 He seems, with his scarce strands of thin, white hairs,
 too feeble for the weight of years he bears.

32

He, toward Rinaldo lifting up his sight,
 speaks to him thus in grave and courteous wise:
“Where are you going? Ah, be warned, Sir knight,
 you seem a dead man to my prescient eyes!
Already more than one man of great might

lies slain whose overweening enterprise
led him into this forest to engage
in futile battle its surpassing rage.

33

“Know that of late into this forest there
has come a fierce, enormous stallion.
There is not a prouder courser anywhere,
be it in realms of ice or scorching sun.
The boar, the lion and the savage bear
from him like rabbits to the thickets run;
his passage knocks huge trees upon the ground,
and makes the earth and air quake all around.

34

“Flee therefore, doomed, unhappy man, or hide
in some dark cave. Even now I seem to hear
the thunder of his fast-approaching stride.
Your strength is useless, and your warlike gear.
For myself, if by sure tokens I descried
the truth, I have no cause to flee from here:
he will not seize this feeble, aging prey
whom Nature leads already to decay.”

35

Rinaldo, by these words nothing dismayed,
showed not the slightest sign of fear, for he,
hot with desire for fame, saw ready-made
at hand a glorious opportunity.
Thus he in daring words this answer made,
with generous anger burning inwardly
to hear a man urge him to coward flight,
as if a famous death were cause for fright:

36

“Let him who wishes flee; a knight won’t run,
or use his spurs when he can use his lance.
The more he seems by danger and pain undone,
the fiercer will a worthy man advance.
Even now I am determined not to shun,
in trial of my valor, this fair chance;
and were the burning pole to bar my path
I’d meet this one opponent’s utmost wrath.”

37

At this the old man looked up earnestly
and courteously replied: “I’m pleased to learn,
Sir, of your mettle and delight to see
how Nature makes your noble boldness burn.
No man I’ve ever known more fearlessly
heard words like mine, which, meant to make you turn
from danger, did not chill your hot desire,
but stoked and added fuel to the fire.

38

“And I believe that Nature has endowed
your daring heart with needful courage too,
and that your hands shall, even as you vowed,
conclude the perilous venture you pursue.
Go then, follow you high desires, be proud
to strive for honor and success, and you,
destined to prosper in your every aim,
shall live long after death in glorious fame.

39

“And that you may, when you at last are found
at war with that huge steed (who did not spare
others), withstand his fury in his lair
and break him the more readily, take care

to drag him will he nil he to the ground,
for then he will grow mild, and gladly bear
your weight, and be as easily controlled
as Xanthus* by great Hector* was of old.

40

“There is a tale, to many men unknown;
though you may doubt it, I will tell it now:
Great Amadis*, whose glory all men own,
fair Oriana’s husband, while he steered his prow
across the sea, was by dry Notus* blown
ashore on the Isle Perilous. (Yet how
it was named then is lost to memory—
I use the name men give it currently)

41

“And there he tamed that horse, though bowed by years,
and took it back to France; but when his lot
was full and his soul mounted toward the spheres,
leaving the whole earth lightless and distraught,
to join on heavenly thrones his deathless peers,
his steed was to a cavern near here brought
by the great sorcerer Alchiso, who
wished to effect some marvel strange and new.

42

“A spell placed on that stallion by this good
and excellent magician’s power meant
that no knight in the whole world ever should
by wit or force make it obedient,
except a man born of the royal blood,
from Amadis* derived by due descent,
and one whose valor, if it not exceeds
his forebear’s, equals it by warlike deeds.

43

“The sorcerer’s task being done, no tidings nor
 signs of that steed till lately did appear,
but since they did, ten circuits and ten more
 has Cynthia* made round her celestial sphere:
and it is licit to conclude therefore
 that even now the fated term is near
 for that enchantment’s spell to be undone,
 and the fierce courser to be tamed and won.

44

“Nor marvel that the stallion is not dead
 after the passing of so many years,
for even the Parcae* cannot cut the thread
 of a life enchanted with their dreaded shears.
Since he was charmed, just one short hour instead
 of centuries in the book of Fate appears.
 Great is the power of sorcery; it excels
 or rivals Nature in its potent spells.

45

“Where this wood ends, a cavern yawns, and there
 that stallion dwells. He never leaves that nest
except to trample all who unaware
 have to his hiding place too boldly pressed.
Since I must go, stay if you will, and dare;
 and since you are determined on the quest,
 do no forget: when his flanks press upon
 the ground, he’ll falter and you will have won.”

46

This said, he vanished, and so quickly sped
 into the forest’s thick obscurity,
the sun no more abruptly hides his head

when his bright chariot plunges in the sea.
Rinaldo stayed behind, assailed by dread,
like a weak man on a sickbed dizzily
in broken sleep dimly imagining
some strange, impossible, or monstrous thing.

47

That seeming old man whom the woods now hide
was Malagis in an old man's disguise--
good Malagis, long to Rinaldo allied
by noble love's and closest kinship's ties:
the best mage of his days, who always tried
to be as good of will as he was wise,
wherefore he honorably spent his days
in aid of others' honorable ways.

48

He had used his spells to make Rinaldo stay
a while in France, since he had fears
some evil force might spirit him away
before his strength should ripen with his years.
But now, since more propitious stars held sway
(no wise man will oppose contrary spheres),
he let him go his way and made him see
the gear he needed hanging on that tree.

49

Rinaldo meanwhile through the gloomy wood
spurred on his steed by paths that loop and wind,
tracking that other steed, clueless of what road
to take toward the goal he sought to find.
At every rustling noise he heard, he slowed
his speed while wild hope leapt up in his mind,
imagining he had found him. Thus in vain

he wandered till the sun plunged in the main.

50

Then he dismounted near a grass-grown well

(one of the four Merlin erected there)

and let its waters and some berries quell

fatigue and hunger with their simple fare.

But as soon as once more Phoebus*' radiance fell

out of the East and brightened all the air,

he rose and turned back to his quest once more

and galloped through the forest as before.

51

He rode a long way, mind and eyes intent

on nothing but his yearned-for enterprise,

till, at the hour when Apollo* sent

rays perpendicular down from the skies,

he heard the air of all the forest rent

by a noise of running beasts; wherefore he hies

toward the sound, while with a joyful start

he feels his hopes redouble in his heart.

52

At last he sees out of the gloom appear

a graceful doe, whiter than milk in hue,

that borne on nimble hooves is drawing near,

panting and drenched in sweat, and yet unto

her tired limbs and fainting heart her fear

seems to lend desperate strength. She drew

near him and hurtled past, and at her back

left a still widening span of woodland track.

53

But soon he saw how, mounted on a steed

swift as an arrow, charging at its rear,

dressed in apparel of outlandish brede,
 a lovely, slender maiden aimed her spear,
who overtook it with impetuous speed
 and struck and slew the timid, fleeing deer,
 for she, an expert huntress, plunged her dart
 haft-deep through the right shoulder in its heart.

54

Rinaldo sees her sprightly, noble air,
 and fine attire; he trembles to behold,
abandoned to the breeze, her golden hair,
 with some few locks tied up in knots of gold,
and the heaving of her ivory bosom where
 her gown's brocade is parted, fold on fold,
 and her upgathered hem that lets him see
 her foot and white leg almost to the knee:

55

her leg and foot that with their snowy white
 through silk of her vermilion buskins peek,
then of her eyes the pure and kindly light,
 the mingled rose and lily of her cheek,
her alabaster brow that by its sight
 dispels worst woe and leaves the strongest weak,
 the pearls and flaming rubies of her smile—
 he sees them all, astonished all the while.

56

Not when, Diana*, in your limpid bourn
 incautious Actaeon your form espied,
was he, seeing your beauty and your scorn
 by awe and wonderment so stupefied,
as now in good Rinaldo's breast was born
 an amorous flame he scarcely could abide,

seeing in dark and lonely woods appear
a shape so lovely and a sight so dear.

57

The dear and lovely image in which glowed
 celestial beauty's bright and amorous ray
from his eyes with pleasing might by a swift road
 down to his heart pursued its secret way
and there, a flattering guest, made its abode;
 at last it seized with high, imperial sway
 utter control of all his heart, and taught
 new laws to govern every other thought.

58

But then, like a quick man and bold, who knows
 how to take Fortune* by the forelock, and
the quicker since the lively fire that glows
 in him is by desire and longing fanned,
he said: "Heaven give you health and fair repose,
 be you the goddess or queen of this land;
 even as your stars have made you fair, so may
 their blessings shower you day after day.

59

"And if Heaven's blessing lend as much delight
 as the glad grace that shines out from your eyes,
I will make bold to say that not a sprite
 happier than you will dwell in Paradise;
for as you now appear unto my sight,
 you seem a blessed angel from the skies:
 wherefore I should indeed be most content
 to see my whole life in your service spent.

60

"But since all-gracious Heaven has pleased to make

so rare a gift as your fair sight to me,
do you reveal what I must undertake
that it till now has hid in secrecy;
for surely, if you speak, your words shall shake
and pierce me like the beauty that I see,
and it but remains that I with holy zeal
adore you as my goddess. Here I kneel.”

61

At these words from Rinaldo, a chaste blush rose
on the fair damsel's cheeks; as in her sphere,
when storms impend, the sun's kind sister glows
with a rosy tinge, so did her face appear;
which made her lovelier still, and made the throes
of burning love the youth felt more severe;
and then she spoke, her every word a dart
or torch that kindled or transfixed his heart:

62

“I am not, Sir knight, what you imagine, nor
are such high words to my poor merit due.
Subject to mighty Charles, the Emperor.
I am a mortal, made by God, like you,
though my brother is a mighty warrior,
of pure descent from the blood royal, who
is Lord of Gascony, but now ventures far,
serving great Charles in the fierce, foreign war.

63

“And I, not yoked in marriage nor a bride,
still follow Cynthia*'s path with service true.
In a nearby castle by this forest's side,
with my dear mother and a chosen few
companions, whom I cherish, I abide.

My name is Clarice. That is all. But you,
who are you, Sir? What merit should allow
your seeming eagerness to serve me now?"

64

After a pause, Rinaldo thus replied:

“From Constantine I trace my origin,
who raised his throne in Greece with joy and pride,
while viceroys ruled far Italy’s demesne.
Aymon’s my sire, whose deeds, known far and wide,
have raised him to the rank of Paladin:
I am Rinaldo, of Clairmont lineage, who
stand here to serve, and would serve none but you.”

65

“Who of your matchless forebears’ excellence
and your great father’s has not heard before?
The whole world testifies to their immense
prowess and wondrous feats, from shore to shore.
Who does not know Orlando, first defense
of Christian bands against the faithless Moor?
But of you Fame as yet makes no report.”
So went the lady’s courteous retort.

66

It stings him to the heart, and grief and shame
consume him, so that in his inmost soul
he seems to die, while wrath’s and envy’s flame
wound him more sorely than all sorrows past.
Wrung from his bosom then, these brief words came,
with which he met her tacit taunt at last:
“I too say that Orlando much excels,
and that his worth is matched by few men else.

67

“And yet to me his valor does not seem
so fearful as to make me shy away
from matching him in arms, however supreme,
without the least reproach or shame some day;
and if Heaven grants, to merit your esteem,
I’ll shortly give you proof of what I say.”
Meanwhile a troop of knights and ladies fair
had ridden up to join the gentle pair.

68

These were Clarice’s noble followers,
riding in search of her and full of fear
that envious Fortune* with some hapless curse
had come to trouble their peace and spoil their cheer,
since they had lost her when she put the spurs
to her palfrey to pursue the fleeing deer.
Thus, as they chanced upon her in this place,
signs of great joy appeared on every face.

69

She, seeing her own, upon Rinaldo now
turned back her lovely countenance and addressed
him thus: “My lord, since Heaven seems to endow
with such audacious confidence your breast,
that with Orlando, whom all men avow
to be of knighthood’s flower the first and best,
you match yourself in strength and martial skill,
now show some portion of your power and will:

70

“for since you boast to be no less in might
than Orlando, here is something to be done:
Joust with this bold band of my warriors, fight
against them, all at once or one-on-one.

At least go prove yourself a worthy knight,
and show that you are truly Aymon's son,
by wielding your intrepid sword and lance
to advance, like him, the honor of fair France."

71

These welcome words made a greet sweetness stir
in the heart of Aymon's son, for eagerly
he wished to gain the palm of victory there
and to make manifest his bravery;
"Hard is the task," he therefore said to her:
"that your commandments here impose on me:
but, by your beauty spurred, my best hopes rise
that I'll achieve this weighty enterprise."

72

This said, he grasps his courser's bridle tight
and turns the steed where all those warriors stand;
he scans their features first with piercing sight,
then boldly speaks to the assembled band:
"O valiant lords, not scorn or wrath, no slight
or shame or injury suffered at your hand,
but a fairer cause makes me here challenge you
to a sharp trial of what your powers can do.

73

"So gird yourselves for war, so that it may
be seen which of you is most worthy of
serving this noble lady, and in the fray
prevails to show his strength and prove his love ."
And strong Alcastus, who held Thessaly*'s sway,
his father being dead, then forward strove,
like a man pricked on by burning love and pride,
and in words fierce and bitter thus replied:

74

“Madman, you’ve spoken well, but now you’ll see
how well this lance can strike, and soon you’ll know
the error of a man who hastily
mistakes his strength and courts his overthrow.”
He had from Greece to France crossed recently
to sow his mischief, where he came to know
Clarice and, knowing her, soon felt the smart
of love’s sharp arrow lodged within his heart.

75

And since his sire and Charles, for many a year,
had lived in hate and dire suspicion,
he wished not to be recognized, for fear
of outrage or attack, and so, spurred on
by tyrant Love*, caused himself to appear
of mean estate, and let himself be drawn
in Clarice’s service, using this disguise
to find advantage in his enemies’ eyes.

76

Since love means jealousy *par excellence*,
and its whole force is oft discovered so,
with savage voice and troubled countenance
he now in haughty words assailed him so
that good Rinaldo, who perceived at once
defiance in the proud speech of his foe,
wheeled round his horse and put his lance at rest:
nor was the other slow to face the test.

77

To charge both in one instant now prepare,
each firm as rock behind his saddle-bow:
but one of them aims at the helmet, where,

above the brow, the hair begins to show,
the other makes his iron lance-point bear,
with lesser skill, against the chest below;
with quivering shafts they gallop to engage,
each bent to meet his foe with utmost rage.

78

Straight in the chest the fiery youth received
mighty Alcastus' knotty shaft, whose force
would have the best of champions heaved
from the saddle, but he remained upon his horse
His foe was less unshaken and more grieved,
for he, struck in the forehead in mid-course
by a bitter, deadly thrust, dropped to the ground
and drenched with blood the black earth all around.

79

Rinaldo in his saddle rose up high,
and toward the other swiftly made his way:
one more blow at the head, one at the thigh—
and with two blows he ended thus the fray.
The rest attacked then, but he made them fly
raking their ranks with his great spear, and they
scattered in terror, till, by evil luck,
his great shaft fell in splinters as he struck.

80

That lance being gone, his enemies assail
him from all sides with bolder hope once more;
Yet neither hope nor boldness in him fail
but both grow even stronger than before,
and he, now without weapon, does not quail,
although from every side they press and pour:
so will a dauntless heart wrest strength and power

from adverse Fortune* in an evil hour.

81

Clarice meanwhile stands motionless as she
 beholds that young man's valor in the fight;
his valor begets wonder presently,
 and wonder begets pleasure and delight:
and her delight, the more she comes to see,
 makes a sweet fire in her heart burn bright;
 so, as she watches and calls him the best
 of knights, love step by step invades her breast.

82

His enemies now at the great warrior's back
 rushed up more fiercely: one from behind
strikes off his helmet's crest, while others hack
 and batter at his shield, and sharp points find
his face, his thighs, his arms, and crack on crack
 his armor shows from blows of every kind:
 Rinaldo now attacks, and now retires,
 and unto victory gallantly aspires.

83

He grips, turning his courser to the right,
 the fiercest by the neck, and with one thrust
wrenches him downward from his saddle's height
 and hurls him, crushed and dying, to the dust;
another, who his helmet seeks to smite
 and in his long spear's force has placed his trust,
 he makes sprawl low, with the impact of his horse,
 and then employs his fists' tremendous force.

84

Here one was struck with a buffet so immense,
 it smashed all through his helmet, cracked his head,

and robbed him of all vigor and all sense.

And yet the others' fury is not dead,
for Linco, one of them, rides to the offense,
more speedily than raging flame is sped,
and to oppose his power makes a stand,
thinking in vain he has the stronger hand.

85

But Rinaldo lifts him bodily from his horse,
and whirls him roundabout high in the air;
then with miraculous and tremendous force
flings him among his enemies, who stare,
amazed, and yield at last and take recourse
in flight to shun the rage that meets them there.
But Clarice, full of admiration, now
came toward him with glad and serene brow,

86

and said: "O noble warrior, you have shown
clear proof of your great valor; there is none
here present to deny that, overthrown
by you, all these brave men have been undone,
and that the palm of victory is yours alone.
Cease then this dreadful jousting. You have won:
Therefore forget your quarrel, quit the field.
since all men here unto your fury yield."

87

As, when Tyrrhenian surges crash and rave
and, sky-high, swallow ships and still increase,
till Neptune*, borne in triumph, with his grave
and gracious countenance bids their war to cease,
and all the sea grows placid, wave on wave,
and scarce a ripple stirs to break its peace:

so at her loving speech and charming sight
the knight checks all his wrath and calms his spite.

88

But since Apollo* in the Hesperian sea
already dipped his wheels of golden fire,
the wounded on their stretchers presently
were sent ahead, each tended by his squire,
as slowly homeward the fair company
of lords and ladies set out to retire;
and soon the happy champion, as they walk,
with his fair Clarice fell in pleasant talk,

89

and on the way he now and then let fall
some word of love, or looked and heaved a sigh;
but she seemed not to understand at all
or gave some proud, indifferent reply,
that pierced his soul, and like a bitter gall
greatly curtailed his pleasure by and by;
for, though her heart concealed an equal glow,
she was not yet disposed to let him know.

90

Alas! she knows not that Love*'s torch will burn
hotter if hidden, and with brighter flame,
as fires pent up in a forge will turn
to a heat that blasts their iron vessel's frame.
Yet the young warrior, who does not discern
what lies concealed beneath her scorn or shame,
believes her feigned demeanor, and is caught
in pangs of doubt and agonies of thought.

91

Ah! many a lady will in her haughty face

show bitter scorn, although her heart is still
a mark for Love* to shoot at and a place
of welcome for that wily archer's skill;
incautious is the man who thinks to trace
in outward semblances the hidden will:
for there is an art to make a foolish prey
of him who runs toward her who runs away.

92

What most afflicts the knight with grief and woe,
since she seems not to share his ardent flame,
is that he thinks his merit is too low
to be considered by so high a dame;
yet he still hopes to rise in glory, and so
to make her prize and love him for his fame:
thus, as a spur drives a swift steed, Love*'s fire
makes noble hearts to noble deeds aspire.

93

As they draw near her keep, the amorous knight
bids farewell to the lovely maid, and she
invites him to repose with her that night,
with pleasant looks and courteous words and free,
but he, who earlier fought with all his might
to do her will and please her fantasy,
now, when she frankly seeks his love, retires
and turns his back on what he most desires.

CANTO TWO

1

Rinaldo leaves and, leaving so unkind,
 feels that his heart has left his burning breast.
Nothing he meets can cheer his woeful mind,
 nothing can lift the weight his soul oppressed.
He should have stayed, he thinks, not left behind
 that pleasing love or scorned her kind request,
 that lovely maid, whose slave he is now—he,
 who lately, more than woodland deer, was free.

2

Six times or seven he turns back his horse
 to seek his true love at her castle door,
then he resolves on the contrary course
 and travels onward as he did before.
As dust is driven by some wind's mad force,
 he wanders, love-lorn, with his soul at war.
 Lost in a thousand thoughts, his mind is caught
 in coils that cannot grasp some single thought.

3

At last he speaks in bitter care, mid sighs
 and tears that on his trembling lids amass:
“Would you, desire for honor, have me rise,
 yet bring me (madman!) to this perilous pass?
How could you bid me seek high enterprise,
 if I have left my heart behind. Alas!
 War calls for hearts, not merely skill and power:
 without a heart, must shame then be my dower?

4

“Ah why, so courteously by her besought
 in such sweet, amorous tones, did I not stay

with her, without whom I must err, distraught,
burning, bereft of peace, day after day?
Who, if not you, cruel honor, turned to naught
her prayers and ordered me to turn away?
You forced me to refuse; compelled by you,
I (wretch!) to my own good became untrue.”

5

He paused, eyes fixed upon the ground, then thus
resumed his speech with dark and troubled brow:
“Ah! how desire with mad and spurious
counsel bids me return to Clarice, how
false my whole discourse seems, how fatuous,
that leans on such poor props to disallow
that a low, caitiff knight must never appear
before a maid so noble and so dear.

6

“Never (no use denying it) did I
do deeds to make me worthy of her sight;
her prudent mind can show no reason why
I should to her least notice claim a right.
To my first words, the scorn in her reply
was but my due; and if she did invite
me later on, high courtesy prevailed.
I knew it well, and so my courage failed.

7

“My stay would not have pleased her, and I should
not dream of actions she considers ill.
Were I renowned and proved in arms, she would
have less fear of my boldness and my will,
and her dear face, that stirs up all my blood,
and kindled all its fires, and feeds them still,

would lend me strength and daring to aspire,
and offer wings and sails to my desire.

8

“Yet, reft now of my heart, my breast instead
is by her image utterly controlled,
by which it, more than by my heart, is sped
toward virtue and enlivened to grow bold.”

Clarice meanwhile, by amorous longing fed,
no less complains, her cheeks now hot, now cold;
no less than he she suffers and complains,
but weeps, beset by even harsher pains.

9

She bathes her face in tears and, giving rein
to sighs and to laments, thus vents her woes :
‘What deadly venom with such ceaseless pain
poisons, O wretched Clarice, your repose?
What sickness, sweet yet bitter, can contain
such tender joy in such tormenting throes?
What lends your burning heart this wild desire
and with both hope and grief sets it afire?

10

“Too clearly now (alas!) I’ve come to see
(and find no joy at all in what I’ve learned),
that Love*, who makes the proudest bend the knee,
makes trial of me, for he is the one I spurned;
that he has entered in my heart, that he
claims it like a new mansion he has earned,
who in hope’s heaven and desire’s hell
makes heat and tender sense together dwell.

11

“But when did I and he, who now somehow

both gladdens me and grieves me, come to fight?
When did he (wretch that now I am!) allow
my capture, either by main force or sleight?
Why will he therefore not defend me now,
but by some hidden treachery takes flight?
How shall I yield, not knowing him, at his pleasure?
How willingly surrender all my treasure?"

12

Meanwhile Rinaldo rode upon his way,
restless in soul and body, till he found
a place where from the damp, nocturnal ray
a high and leafy oak shaded the ground.
Seated upon on a knoll by lovely May
with verdant garlands of new herbage crowned,
two warriors were restoring their oppressed
spirits and weary limbs with food and rest.

13

They courteously invited him to sit,
and he at first refused, but when
he saw that this displeased them, he alit
from his high saddle and sat by these two men.
They, when their meal was over, bit by bit
broke silence and began to talk again,
their converse being lively, frank and free,
such as befits a gallant company.

14

It chanced that good Rinaldo learned they too
were on a quest that savage steed to find;
and one of them, a perfect knight and true,
(his name was Ysolier) slowly inclined
his head, and said with troubled face: "And you

my lord, must change, and quickly change, your mind,
for such a quest for me alone is fit;
you are a madman even to think of it.”

15

Rinaldo rose and said: “At sunrise, I
confront that horse, and I have no intent
to leave him to another. Your reply
insults my honor. Is that what you meant?”
The Spaniard Ysolier was wroth to hear such high
terms uttered in a tone so confident,
wherefore, “You either die right here,” said he,
sword drawn, “or you must yield this quest to me.”

16

The third among the three companions there
was an English baron^{vi}, one of Britain’s best,
bold, stout and strong almost beyond compare,
more famed than most and rivaling the rest.
He once had tracked the stallion to his lair
and fought him, yet had failed to meet the test,
though he had not unaided faced that horse,
but with a band of daring warriors.

17

He had seen the stallion’s savage power displayed,
a power that killed or conquered all his crew,
which made him say lucky was he who made
his escape from that steed without dying too.
He now to the pagan, who, in steel arrayed,
with threatening face at the young warrior flew,
said: “Noble warrior, hear me and be still;
and do not be in such great haste to kill.

18

“In such a strange adventure, do not shun
 companions; for if you should choose to fight
so terrible a beast, to have even one
 man at your side will much assist your might.”

Impatient for the contest to be done,
 the pagan, whose proud spirit burns with spite,
 cuts off his speech and rushes headlong toward
 the fierce young warrior, brandishing his sword.

19

He gathers all his power in one blow,
 and makes his horrid sword descend to pound
and cleave the upraised buckler of his foe,
 and sends it in two pieces to the ground.
The stroke passes beyond, and, downward bound,
 knocks off his helmet’s crest, yet does not go
 further, but, glancing sideways, slightly dents
 the steel plate of his shoulder’s armaments.

20

Placed as a signpost on the field nearby
 lay an old boulder of tremendous weight.
Rinaldo now with strong hand lifts it high
 (that no strength else could even dislocate)
and swiftly hurtling forward makes it fly
 toward his enemy, following the great
 strength of his arm with his whole body’s force
 to endow with utmost speed and power its course.

21

Not with more fury on Pozzuoli*’s plains
 do heavy boulders plummet from the air,
that Nature’s force from the abyss unchains
 and spews forth skyward from the craters there,

when pent up heat the Earth's deep bowels strains
to the bursting point and rips them from her lair,
as this which by the Paladin was sped
and with a loud crash struck the pagan's head.

22

With a loud crash the huge stone strikes to split
the savage pagan's skull, first shattering
the shield he vainly holds opposed to it
to guard himself against the dreadful thing.

Ysolier, trembling, spins around, thus hit,
reft of all sense and strength and tottering.

Lost in dark night, he feels his eyes grow dim
and all his power sapped from every limb.

23

He does not die, but like a dead man lies,
unable to stir hand or foot, an hour
or more, so that Rinaldo, thinking in this wise
in death to have made that furious pagan cower,
at once his wrath and fury mollifies
to yield his heart to gentle pity's power,
and, touched by noble sadness, sighs and weeps,
since in true valor pity never sleeps.

24

Ysolier then, recovering, though he still
feels queasy, for the fierce blow gives him pain,
snatches his sword and with intent to kill
at once toward Rinaldo speeds again.
But the good Englishman with gentle skill
and soothing words persuades him to restrain
his anger, and soon puts their quarrel to rest,
but first reminds them of their perilous quest,

25

saying: "My lords, I urge you to desist
from this adventure, for (as I believe)
no greater dangers anywhere else exist
nor any purpose harder to achieve.
No mortal force or wisdom can resist
that savage steed, no sharp blade can aggrieve.
But if your fixed wills needs must have it so,
together on that undertaking go.

26

"Then one of you might first ride out to greet
that steed's encounter on the woodland track,
and the other in the saddle keep his seat
to see his friend's performance, and hold back.
Still, do not tempt your deaths, my lords, but meet
his furious onset in a joint attack,
nor use such courtesies with him, but ride
to engage him both together, side by side."

27

At these terms, both were pleased, and Ysolier
still more than good Rinaldo showed delight.
But when the sun's fair rays began to tear
through the black, cloudy veil of sullen night,
the knights rose eagerly and mounted their
chargers, both keen for the impending fight,
and, guided by the Briton warrior, they
rode toward the cavern by the quickest way.

28

Nearing the cavern where (he said) the horse,
never long absent thence, was wont to hide,
and seeing Rinaldo toward it make his course,

swordless and without lance or shield, he cried:
“Do you think to overcome that monster’s force
unarmed, or are you bent on suicide?”
He answered him: “No brave man can be harmed,
though he bears no weapons, if his heart is armed.”

29

Meanwhile the fair troop reached the wished-for place.
and there the Englishman bade them farewell
and, giving spur, galloped away apace.
But the other two dismounted in the dell
and left their steeds behind a little ways,
for they on foot meant to confront the fell
encounter, thinking thus with more success
to strike, to turn, to draw back, or to press.

30

Now the great stallion, kicking high, draws nigher
with a thousand skyward leaps, curvets and veers,
and from his nostrils breathes ingathered fire;
he stirs his massive limbs and flicks his ears;
heedless of rocks, thorns, tree-trunks in his ire,
crashing through every hindrance, he appears.
and with loud neighs his enemies defies ,
while thunder from his hooves shakes earth and skies.

31

Bayard he is named, for his bay-chestnut hue.
A star of silver marks his forehead and
white fetlocks top his hooves. Massive of thew,
the sinews on his mighty chest expand.
His belly tight, his face fine, straight and true,
with a curled mane falling rightward, see him stand,

his shoulders huge and muscular--a steed
whose lithe legs promise ample power and speed.

32

Such was Cyllaros* once, until, by force
and skill, Amyclean Pollux* made him tame;
and such, before Mars* bridled him, was the horse
that draws the war-god's chariot. All the same,
though in his rage he speeds upon his course
like a fury bursting from earth's central flame,
he doubles courage in the Paladin
and causes Ysolier but scant chagrin.

33

First Bayard turns on Ysolier, who receives
his thunderous attack with lance in rest.
The great shaft strikes the noble beast, but leaves
no mark nor slows his onslaught. Sorely pressed,
the Spaniard is not slow to yield and gives
him ground, unable to confront that test.
But then the steed veers back and gallops toward
the knight who stands to face him with drawn sword.

34

With drawn sword did he stand, since he well knew
that all attempts to tame the steed were vain.
(His first encounter taught him this was true.)
This being impossible, he had come again
merely to fight the mighty beast and drew
his sharp blade now to give it death or pain.
Only Rinaldo, counseled otherwise,
risked greater peril to obtain the prize.

35

Now Bayard in precipitous rage attacks

the Spaniard with both fore-hooves. Now,
where his forehead bears the star, Ysolier hacks
with his swift blade but vainly hacks that brow.
The horse ignores him, though he never slacks,
thinking he must have wounded him somehow:
He little knows the courser's hide is such
as makes hard steel seem soft wax at its touch.

36

Whistling, the sharp steel once again descends
and strikes with yet more potent force, so that
the savage courser feels the blow and bends
his head a little. In great rage thereat,
he rushes forward with such power, he sends
the pagan to the ground and lays him flat.
He falls, and with him falls all hope that he
could ever entertain of victory.

37

Rinaldo saw Ysolier fall and thought
his friend's life near its end, because he lay
stretched by the roadside senseless and distraught,
sapped of all force, all courage drained away.
He hastens thither and, having reached a spot
sufficiently near the destrier to assay
a sally at him, balls his great fist and
strikes at his muzzle with impetuous hand.

38

The great steed feels such power in that blow
as he felt never after or before.
His mouth foams all vermilion and below
his hooves the ground is glistening with gore.
More swiftly never arrow left the bow,

nor wing-borne falcon ever downward bore
than now the courser veers round in alarm
and with his teeth snaps at the champion's arm.

39

The knight withdraws, but then returns to smite
with force redoubled the great stallion's brow.
Bayard wheels, kicking with both hooves, whose might
could send high mountains to the depths, but now
the Clairmont youth foresees each thrust, each bite,
and, joining skill to force, succeeds somehow,
wherever the stallion turns his feet or face,
to move aside and prudently give place.

40

He ever keeps to one side of the horse
where it can neither kick nor bite, for he
intends that nimbleness, not metal's force,
should countervail his foe's ferocity.
Yet once a slip of foot led him off-course
and he was buffeted most bitterly:
a kick in his right side hurt him so much,
he nearly swooned to feel that horrid touch.

41

He did not fall, but with an effort stayed
upright; and had more frequent kicks than flown,
their force and vigor would have quite unmade
his armor and cracked or crushed his every bone.
Bayard his unchecked fury now displayed,
but then the knight recovered with a moan
and dodged the second cruel blow that came
toward him with yet more power to stun and maim.

42

Yet do those hooves not fall on nothing: no,
 a great oak with its hidden tap root thrust,
deep as it soars above ground, down below
 to nourish it, they shatter into dust.
Those hooves Rinaldo now, before their blow
 can hit him, reaches for and grasps. Now must
 Bayard attempt to shake off this strange thong
 but finds his enemy's vise-like grip too strong .

43

In vain he shifts his hind-legs, and in vain
 he once more turns his mouth on him to bite;
in vain he stoops, leaps, kicks, venting his pain
 and pent-up wrath in loud neighs as they fight.
For one long hour thus they strive and strain:
 At last with utmost force and consummate might,
 but with a skill yet greater and profound,
 brave Aymon's great son pulls him to the ground.

44

Even as the sea surge, earlier churning high
 with horrid menace in its ebb and flow,
at last permits its furious rage to die
 and comes to lie at rest, tranquil and low,
so now that steed, at first so apt to fly
 into a fit of cruel rage, bends low
 and, having touched the ground, is pacified,
 though even in mildness he maintains his pride.

45

The champion pats his neck and strokes his chest
 and smoothes the tangles of his mane away;
the other by loud, joyful neighs expressed

his wish to please his master and obey.
Rinaldo, seeing his fury laid to rest
and overmastered quite, without delay
takes saddle and trappings from his old destrier
and decks his new mount with the gilded gear.

46

The Spaniard in the meantime had regained
his senses while the bold youth struck the steed
and, seeing him tamed already and restrained,
stood silent and bewildered at the deed,
incredulous that those youthful limbs contained
such peerless strength and such relentless speed.
Rinaldo hailed him, and inquired if he
had suffered some disabling injury.

47

Told he had not, they once more took the road
by which the steed had drawn them to their quest.
They followed it until they left the wood
and down into a deep, dark valley pressed
where they encountered a fierce knight who stood
all armed, in green and yellow surcoat dressed,
and by his proud and noble bearing gave
a show of being wondrous fierce and brave.

48

Painted upon his golden shield was shown
the quiver-bearing archer^{vii} on the wing,
a naked child scarcely to boyhood grown,
blindfolded, but in posture threatening,
beneath whose feet ferocious Mars* lay prone
as in defeat. Rinaldo then alone,
seizing a huge lance from his comrade's squire,

challenged that strange knight thus with eyes afire:

49

“To me, far more than you, my lord, this shield
is due; if you deny this, I am fain
to prove it on your body in the field.

Give it to me or fight, for it is plain
it suits me better, since to Love I yield
more truly than all men, whatever the pain.

No man alive more sorely feels his heat
nor serves him with devotion more complete.”

50

“We’ll try this out,” the stranger said and frowned
“and if you win, the shield is yours: although
I trust I’ll shortly cast you to the ground,
unless my strength is feebler than I know .”

This said, seizing his lance, he wheeled around
and paced of a long stretch to charge his foe,
and the other lord, no tardier than he,
made Bayard turn back simultaneously.

51

Taking the impact full upon the chest
the good Rinaldo almost plunged to earth,
for that man’s power and pluck was of the best,
and rarely met a man of equal worth;
but his own lance struck home beneath the crest
and would have killed him, had the girth
of steel upon his helm been weak or thin;
yet it unhorsed him, to his great chagrin.

52

At once the stranger leapt back on his feet,
bewilderment and stupor on his brow,

for he had rarely chanced to lose his seat,
and scarce believed it could have happened now.
Grasping his strong shield, he advanced to meet
his foe, shouting: “Sir, do you think somehow
I’ve paid my debt in full? Now draw your sword^{viii}
and clear the path I’ll make you earn. *En garde!*”

53

Ysolier thereupon, who hopes to shine
as a worthy peer of good Rinaldo, draws
up to his friend and says, “That quarrel is mine;
I’ll clear your path; for in a better cause^{ix}
you’ll as my champion in the future shine.”
This said he leaps to the ground, and without pause
begins the perilous attack. Now high,
now low, he makes his keen sword lunge and slash and fly.

54

Both are expert to strike or parry, and
both have stout limbs and valiant hearts on fire;
both well know when to press ahead or stand,
or when yield to fury and retire;
so that they fight two long hours hand-to-hand,
venting in blows now fast, now slow their ire.
Then luck begins to turn, and before long
Ysolier seems more dexterous and strong.

55

The doughty Spaniard, sensing victory,
enfranchises his spirit, and the more
he gains in power, the more his enemy
declines in strength from what he was before.
Soon the great blows descend so heavily
and press him, hem him in, and tire him sore,

that he perforce gives way and, thus controlled,
yields them the road he can no longer hold.

CANTO THREE

1

When good Reynaldo and the Spaniard came
 away from where they had left to his defeat
that stranger knight (Ransaldo was his name,
 later surnamed “the Fierce” for some great feat),
they wandered far and wide without fixed aim
 in chilling dark and bright sun’s scalding heat;
 nor did a new adventure meet their sight
 either by day or in the gloom of night.

2

At last one day they found, skirting the shore
 by which the river Seine’s course is controlled,
a knight who over his plated armor wore
 a tasseled surcoat damasked all in gold,
whose shield showed the enchanting Siren* of yore
 painted amid great waves that round her rolled.
 He was a warrior huge and stout of limb,
 all bone and sinew by the look of him.

3

He, seeing Rinaldo, cried: “Ha! do you now
 come back again, you foul, dishonored knight?”
and even as he cried thus, struck a blow,
 grasping his sword in both hands, of such might,
and struck again, so that upon the brow
 he smote the youngster, nor did vainly smite,
 for, caught off guard, he reeled and bowed his head
 and slumped in his saddle like a man struck dead.

4

Rinaldo, who at that strong, double blow,
 had bent down over Bayard’s croup, at once

recovering and feeling himself so

 unjustly set upon, at this mischance
gave spur and turned his steed upon his foe,
 mad fury flashing in his every glance.

 Toward his enemy he spurs his steed,
 like mastiff at a boar, but with more speed.

5

The other, parrying, over his head took aim

 and his blade, whistling, fell with force immense;
but he by a side-ways pivot of his charger came
 safely away. At once, back on the offense,
he wheels back, ducking, hurtling toward the frame
 of his opponent, grapples him and sends
 his dagger's point into his right flank Then,
 slashing his arm, he stabs and stabs again.

6

The stranger to his temples, brow and head

 addressed his pummel with such monstrous power
that a great cliff would have groundward plummeted
 thus beat upon, and at those buffets' shower
Rinaldo through his helmet's openings bled
 from mouth and nose, and still he did not cower,
 but with his point twice made vermilion trace
 a gory trail across his foeman's face.

7

While the two knights pursue that horrid fight

 their coursers also wage atrocious war
They leap and push, they kick and thrust and bite,
 both causing painful wounds that drip with gore.
Bayard at last, that creature of most might
 among, not merely steeds, but all beasts, bore

in a leap the other down and made him drop,
tumbling his master with his horse on top.

8

His horse on top, his master lies below,
right foot and right arm quite pinned down. He tries
by strength and skill to raise himself, but no
efforts to free him from that weight suffice.
By then the blood's uninterrupted flow
from out his veins had left him cold as ice,
but Rinaldo, no less courteous than strong,
thought that to let him die like this was wrong.

9

The knight dismounts, and as he groans, confined,
puts out his hand to raise him whence he lay;
then he steps back and says, in accents kind:
“Now let us, if it please you, stop this fray.”
He, who by then was truly of a mind
to prefer peace to warfare, straight away,
bowing with a most humble gesture, tendered
his sword to him hilt first, and so surrendered.

10

“I confess myself defeated, sir,” he said,
“no less by your great courtesy than by
your bravery, for I would now be dead
had not your native goodness aided me;
and surely you the other day were led
by different motives than mere villainy,
to attack us so unfairly as to pounce
upon us and to slaughter both our mounts.”

11

The youth, astonished, opens wide his eyes

hearing these words, then says: “Indeed,
never could I my honor so much disprize
as to use my weapon’s edge against your steed,
since it is foul disgrace for any knight who tries
to make the horses of his foemen to bleed;
I don’t know when I offended you or how;
and never, I think, have seen you until now.”

12

The stranger warrior, hearing this, stood quite
Motionless also, addled and distressed.
Then with more careful scrutiny that knight
eyed Aymon’s gallant son from heel to crest.
He looked and soon discovered in plain sight
the cause of his mistake made manifest:
the painted shield where Cupid* stood displayed,
had led him to the error he had made.

13

Wherefor he says “There was a knight who came,
as full of vice as you of courtesy,
bearing a shield embellished with the same
device as yours. He struck and wounded me,
and I, in whom fierce anger and hot shame
burned and contended for the mastery,
deceived at first glance by the shield you carry,
in my assault upon you did not tarry.”

14

He was going to say more and in detail
relate that miscreant’s actions from the start,
but now Rinaldo, seeing his spirits fail
since blood gushes in streams from many a part,
desired, before attending all his tale,

that Ysolier, skilled in medicinal art
(in those days prized in warriors) should attend
the hurts he had received and make them mend.

15

After his wounds were seen to and his pain
had eased, the stranger warrior spoke anew:
“I was returning from where Charlemagne
besieged the African’s unnumbered crew,
and had just crossed the Alps’ harsh passes, when
I met a maid^x of pleasant aspect who
begged me to be her escort on the way
to her castle on the Seine. Without delay

16

“I promised that I would--yea, vowed that I
would see her safely anywhere she went.
Together, hour by hour, we rode, through high
and low, onward till she was nearly spent
by sheer exhaustion and began to sigh..
At last we met, while making our descent
into a vale, a knight by the roadside
who me in haughty words like these defied:

17

“ ‘Resign this maid to me at once, good sir,
nor hesitate an instant, for (I fear)
to hesitate will cost you not just her,
but, if I’m what I was, something more dear.
So fine a girl, so noble and so fair
befits you not as she whom I see here.
For she’s as beautiful as I am brave,
and you seem worthless even to be her slave.’

18

“The arrogant words thus uttered out of spite
by that proud man I answered fittingly,
saying, with lance uplifted high: ‘The right
to try your strength now falls to me;
though I would rather that your sinews’ might
were matched by courteous grace and chivalry.’
What need for more words? We without delay,
mustering our courage, charged into the fray.

19

“At the first onset, fiercely though we pressed,
neither of us threw the other from his steed,
yet he received a wound square in the chest
that stained his green and yellow jerkin red.
He, knowing by this that triumph in that test
would be no easy matter, now instead
lowered his lance and with discourteous force
thrust it into the bowels of my horse.

20

“In that same instant, with a sudden slash
of his lance, he killed the lady’s palfrey too;
and fled so quickly that a lightning flash
or raging whirlwind scarcely could pursue.
I was left on foot, struck speechless by his rash
depravity, and racked with wrath and rue,
then turned my steps to seek him by the same
path upon which I and the lady came.

21

“Five time since then across the sky the night
returned to spread her starry cloak, and five
times Phoebes has brought back the glad daylight
in his warm bosom, nor could I contrive,

since I began my quest for that vile knight,
to right my wrong,. I found no man alive
who knew of him or put me on his scent,
or told me who he was, or where he went.”

22

Hearing these words, Rinaldo knows straightway
that the man this knight was searching for was he,
decked out in yellow and in green array,
whose shield of Love he conquered recently;
therefore, to please him, he proceeds to say
how, where, and when he won it; then feels free
to ask him about Charles’ camp again,
and Fortune*’s dealings with the Saracen;

23

and how it was that he, who seemed like so
valiant a knight, so apt to do and dare,
had left that camp, in which his honor’s glow
could shine with brighter luster than elsewhere.
Then he to him: “That doubt, I’ll have you know,
racked me as well, and why I came from there
you presently shall plainly hear rehearsed;
but let me answer your first question first.

24

“Charles now controls the high sea’s watery ways,
and all the coast and the adjacent plain.
The Saracen force in scattered strongholds stays
pent up, with scant supplies of arms or grain,
and no help from allies nearby to raise
its spirits in that peril. Hope seems vain,
and in the extremes of danger and of fear,

horror on every face shows death is near.

25

“Only the king of Garba, Sobrin hight,
and Atlas, Lord of Algiers, in some wise
safeguard the Moors: the one a perfect knight
the other a giant of appalling size.
But among the Christian Paladins in that fight
no fame higher than young Orlando’s flies;
hearing his name, all foes feel courage fail,
and even Atlas and Sobrin grow pale.

26

“Now if you still wish me to tell you why
I parted from that martial gathering
(where I indeed more than in France might try
to give of my true worth a reckoning),
I’ll start afresh: so hear me now, while I
bring strange, unheard-of news about a king--
a king who sent me to great Charles, for he
of whom I speak is lord and liege to me:

27

“Frankard, who in the Orient holds the proud
rule of Armenia and the lands nearby,
(no finer warrior lives where sun or cloud
over vast Asia’s bounds bestride the sky
except perhaps his cousin Mambrin, endowed
by Heaven with more than human bravery)
was as a boy inflamed with amorous heat
for a princess high-born, gracious, fair and sweet.

28

He burned with love for Clarinea who--
 sole daughter of Assyria's king, possessed
of wondrous wisdom, and discernment too,
 besides her beauty, which was of the best--
at once saw Francard's merit and in due
 course, with calm brow receiving him, expressed,
 little by little, by chaste signs her pleasure,
 thus heightening his love's fire beyond measure.

29

The young man, finding himself grown so dear
 in her eyes, to his infinite delight,
since all her acts and looks have made it clear
 she loves him better than her life or sight,
is all the keener to display some rare
 effect of his own high love and its might
 and ever thinks how he might satisfy her
 with some more absolute pledge of his desire.

30

“One day, to pleasure her, he vowed to ride
 the length and breadth of Asia and to face
in mortal battle any who defied
 his challenge that her loveliness and grace
exceeded all, and to do so unsupplied
 with armor, till he had in every place,
 in whatsoever royal seat or land,
 maintained this claim with lance and sword in hand.

31

“Armed with that challenge then my Lord Francard
 throughout great Asia's realms went sojourning,
felled Dulicon, slew Thisbos and Algard,

fierce giants both, crushed Olbrand, Tyre*'s king,
most expert in the use of lance and sword,
as strong as brave, and in the dust did fling
the Sultan who, half leopard and half man
ruled Babylon* and savage Kurdistan^{xi}.

32

“The noble victor now was homeward bound,
loaded with glorious enemy spoils, when he
by chance discovered that there might be found
a temple in India, wonderful to see:
the Temple of Beauty it was called, renowned
for its array of painted imagery,
where the loveliest women that had ever been
alive, or would be living, could be seen.

33

“Culled from the fairest whom each age did prize
some five or six are there portrayed. Each stands,
in the shape that Nature did (or will) devise,
her effigy not formed by mortal hands
but by a peerless sorcerer and wise,
who could effect all his deep mind's commands
with demon aid; and he all entry barred
by monstrous beasts he conjured for their guard.

34

“None could behold the riches hid among
that temple's treasures, marvelous and fair,
unless he first engaged two beast that sprung
at him in single fight and slew them there.
But never a monster spawned by earth or flung
from ocean depths or pouncing from the air

could ever dismay Francard's heart, for he
had strength that equaled his audacity.

35

"Soon as he learned that temple's fame, to find
it out was his first thought, to force access
his next, despite those beasts of hellish kind
that unnerved all else with extreme distress.
But he determined in his inmost mind
to level the temple to the ground, unless
he found her there, and high above the rest,
who lit the flame that burned within his breast.

36

"He finds the temple, dares the guards to fight,
kills them, and smashes down the gate; then lets
himself begin the labors of sweet sight--
and all he first resolved upon, forgets.
For what he now sees separates him quite
from what first tangled him in amorous nets--
a vision of such loveliness and grace,
it makes a blank of Clarinea's face.

37

"Though Nature in Clarinea made appear
the rarest gifts fame blazoned in her day,
he sees so many such well formed faces here,
she seems to him no lovelier than they;
nor does her picture hang where, far and near,
the temple of its beauties makes display,
for many as fair as she, or fairer, were
found wanting by the cunning sorcerer.

38

“Name, land, and lineage of each maid on view
were stamped below in characters of gold,
and when her godlike form moved known unto
mortals on earth in courtly wise was told;
but of all future beauties, or those who
were now alive or lived in days of old,
one, beneath whom the name of ‘Clarice’ shone,
burned and transfixed my master’s heart alone.

39

“Whether by destiny, or because he knows
she lives, and in the flower of youth, whence came
hope he might have her (for love ever grows
from hope and hope gives it an aim),
or since her beauty all others’ overthrows,
for her alone his heart is set aflame;
the others he might prize and much admire,
but sighs for her, for her burns in love’s fire.

40

“He meant to seize the image, which hung near
a jeweled, consecrated altar-stone
whence, burning in a crystal chandelier
held by the Cyprian^{xii}, a fierce radiance shone,
but found his every care frustrated here
by wizard spells of long-dead Anachrone
(such was the name of that rich temple’s master,
that new Atlante, that new Zoroaster^{xiii}).

41

“Thus finding that all effort was in vain,
vain all designs to carry it away,
he had it copied over and over again

on canvas, bronze, in marble, wood and clay.
His artists were so skilled and took such pain,
 none worthier of that task exists today;
 each wrought a work that seemed alive, exact
 in every garment, gesture, air and act.

42

“In these beloved likenesses he now
 for many days took solitary pleasure.
But cruel Love* at last will not allow
 the sweet deceit of that imagined treasure
and makes his heart to fierce desire bow
 (that heart which burns and aches beyond all measure),
 desire that, weary of shadows, ever vies
 for life and truth to melt the mist of lies.

43

“So that, made fretful by this hot desire
 that grows and plagues him so incessantly,
he now has sent to Charlemagne to inquire
 whether, if his great power set him free
of the Moorish hordes and forced them to retire
 at once with no hope of returning, he
 might deign to let him wed and eastward bring
 fair Clarice, sister to the Gascon king.

44

“That Clarice had a brother, and that his name
 was Ives, the bridler of the Gascons, who
was a vassal of whom Charlemagne could claim
 allegiance—all of these were things he knew.
He had partly read them in the temple when he came
 to quit his old love’s service for his new,

and partly heard one of his barons tell,
who knew the French nobility full well.

45

“If Charles gives her to him (as many say
he will, and thus the whole camp’s rumor flies),
she may keep her religion, if that way
seems true and good in her eyes, he agrees;
and if an heir is born to wield the sway
of great Armenia’s royal signories,
he too may follow Christ, he fully grants,
since all kings must who are subject to France.

46

“In Francard’s name, empowered to produce
these terms, I brought them to great Charles’ court
nor hid the rest: that if he should refuse
or say they are ungenerous or fall short,
Francard will join the Moorish cause and use
his matchless power to work his ruin: in short,
strip him of all he has and by main force
seize Clarice, with no man to stop his course.

47

“But the king makes kind reply and thus contrives
politely to keep hope alive, without
concluding matters, and I see he strives
to keep his council and keep me in doubt.
Wherefore I later went to seek out Ives
and told him what the parley was about.
who answered that he first would have to know
Clarice’s mind ere he said yes or no.

48

“He had to see, he said, before he made
any decision, where his sister stood,
and his old mother, whose opinions swayed
that family’s mind more than all others could..
I myself sought out Clarice and with that maid
behaved as any trusted envoy would.
The king gave me good escort, but as we crossed
the Alps, these men along the way were lost.”^{xiv}

49

“So here, Sir knight, you have the reason why
I left the camp and you now find me here;
it has been the first theme of my speech, for I
to you above all wished to make it clear,
so that at some occasion by and by
you might convince her (if you gain her ear),
not to disdain being Asia’s queen and so
plunge France into the last extremes of woe.”

50

Rinaldo, while the pagan warrior spoke,
felt indignation rise within his breast
and twice or thrice felt tempted by some stroke
to vent a wrath too strong to be repressed,
then broke his silence, crying: “Is this some joke?
Your master must be mad, or blind at best,
if he indeed thinks that his sword or lance
could ever terrify a knight of France.

51

“Let him come on then, this way let him ride
with his unwarlike, faint-heart regiments,
he’ll see how we can break the horns of pride

and tame his arrogance and drive him hence;
but if he is loath that endless night should hide
his name and keeps some scrap of common sense,
let him not seek for wives from us, and by
threats purchase nothing but defeat and die.”

52

This said, he took his leave, and again set out,
accompanied by the Spanish knight, who pressed
to go with him with ardor so devout
that he agreed, though solitude seemed best.
He rides in silent thought, but round about
the air feels the still fire from his breast,
the still fire closed up in the sighs he heaves
from the depths of his mute heart that aches and grieves.

53

Over and over he revolves each thing
the Siren Knight had said that made him smart.
Love*'s iron key unlocks the gates to bring
fierce foes into his burnt and wounded heart.
Desire fights Fear, Fear fights Desire, the sting
of Doubt poisons all fancies from the start;
now this, now that seems better or worse to do
and both in bitter war his breast imbrue.

54

No more inconstantly with furious din
do whirlwinds rush to battle to and fro
in the black sky, and turn, now out, now in,
each bent upon the other's overthrow,
no faster flags on summits flap and spin,
to show which way the fitful tempests blow,

than he now reels in thoughts of every kind
and twists and racks his agitated mind.

55

Eyes on the ground, with frozen countenance
the youth rode a long while in little cheer,
distracted, nor did any circumstance
to break his deep thought meet his eye or ear.
At last one day, chancing to raise his glance,
he saw a strange, uncanny sight draw near:
two powerful knights, in armor *cap-a-pie*,
sculpted in bronze with peerless artistry.^{xv}

56

In their posture, as they faced each other, true
daring and pride and menace were expressed.
Grasping a shield in one hand sat those two,
and in the other a strong lance at rest--
a lance not made of bronze, though the master who
wrought it here too wrought at his best.
Beneath that pair, inscriptions marked the spot.
“Tristram*” was one, the other “Lancelot*.”

57

From glinting bronze a living valor glows
on their bold faces as they gaze around,
and seeing their horses, you’d almost suppose
you heard their neighs’ and hoof-beats’ thunderous sound.
Then, after a brief interval, there rose
a high and shapely column from the ground
on whose smooth, white marble letters of pure gold
in verse the legend of these statues told.

58

Rinaldo gaped in wonder, seeing how
that splendid work all marks of beauty bore,

a work so fine that experts would allow

Phidias* could not improve upon it, nor
my own Danese^{xvi}, who outdoes him now
as much as he outdid all those before.

Then, looking at the column again, he read
the inscription on its marble base, which said:

59

“Great Lancelot* and great Tristram* here of old

made trial of the utmost of their might;

Through the air of these hills and these valleys rolled
the thunderous echoes of that furious fight.

Here now their effigies, in bronze and gold

wrought by a master’s hand, gleam in the light.

These are their portraits, even such were they
when they in horrid combat met that day.

60

“These were the lances wielded by these two,

still sound and whole, for they are made

of bone from a strange creature hitherto

unknown to men. Here they now stand displayed,

destined by me for two great champions who

shall be mightier still and unafraid.

Let lesser men from the attempt refrain,
for no man should go venturing in vain.”

61

The Paladin, to whom this quest was known

through intermittent rumors formerly,

now told the Spaniard, who knew nothing, thrown

into mute wonder that such things could be,
that the great magus Merlin*, who alone
could do such work, had carved these, and that he
had made these wondrous lances too and then
freely bestowed them on these two great men;

62

but after their demise had placed them here,
each statue gripping his enchanted lance,
until another brave pair should appear
in days to come and wrest them from their hands.

The Spaniard (who was known to have no peer
for courage) then exclaimed: "Now I perchance
can show you what I'm made of. Perhaps I
am destined for this venture. Let me try."

63

This said, he reached out eagerly to take
the mighty shaft of Tristram's lance, but found
the statue makes him toil and strain and quake,
then with a kick prostrates him on the ground.
Ah, Merlin*, what great portents you would make
once upon French and English soil abound!
Beyond belief, each of your wonders seems
a lying fable, or the stuff of dreams!

64

Then did Rinaldo also place his hand
fiercely upon it, after some delay.
Lo! Tristram*'s statue bowed before him and
opened his fist, yielding the shaft straightway:
that shaft that many vainly would command
he now entrusts to that great warrior's sway.

He bows, and by that bow makes clearly known
Rinaldo's worth as greater than his own.

65

A simple child will from its native bough
 pluck the desired fruit with no more pleasure,
nor greedy pauper with more joyous brow
 gather a lavish, long-desired treasure,
as he what many sought before him now
 seizes. He pulls the heavy shaft at leisure,
 then, with no wish to linger longer, they
 in search of new adventure rode away.

¹ *O Muse . . . grander themes*: An echo of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* and of the opening lines (later cancelled) of his *Aeneid*. Tasso's use of the *topos* is primarily conventional, since the bulk of his lyric poetry in fact postdates the composition of *Rinaldo*; however, by the time of publication he had indeed written a number of lyrics for Lucrezia Bendidio.

² *Luigi d'Este's proud device*: The dedicatee of the poem was Cardinal Luigi d'Este (1538-1586), son of Ercole d'Este and Queen Renée of France, younger brother of Alfonso II d'Este, Duke of Ferrara. He was Bernardo Tasso's patron, and Tasso himself eventually entered his service in 1565. The "device" is probably the Este family coat-of-arms: a silver eagle on a blue ground (flying heavenward?). Luigi's personal emblem, however, was "Prometheus bearing fire in a stalk of fennel."

³ *With purple crowned*: wearing the Cardinal's hat. Luigi d'Este, then just twenty-three years old, was elevated to the cardinalship a year prior to the publication of *Rinaldo*. He was named Cardinal-Protector of France, a position that gave him enormous influence in the Papal Curia; hence Tasso's inference, in the next stanza, that he would eventually become Pope.

⁴ *Ill-gotten conquest*: the Holy Land.

⁵ *This device . . . bear*: Rinaldo eventually discards the leopard shield (see 8.72 below). One may well wonder how his descendants recovered it.

^{vi} *English baron*: This knight is never named. Tasso perhaps intended him for Astolfo, the British prince in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, who rides not only the fierce stallion, Rabican, but also the Hippogriff. He, at any rate, disappears from Tasso's poem after a dozen stanzas.

^{vii} *The quiver-bearing archer*: Cupid*.

^{viii} *Draw your sword*: Rinaldo, it will be remembered, has no sword to draw, since he vowed to employ none unless he first wrests it in battle from a worthy foe (see 1.26-27 above). His present opponent is evidently unworthy; thus Ysolier must now take up the quarrel.

^{ix} *Better cause*: Rinaldo's future fight with the giant Atlas, from whom he will take the sword Fusberta (see 6.25-36 below).

^x *I met a maid*: Though not named, this lady can be none other than Clarice. Tasso's account of her movements is somewhat unclear. Apparently she has been picked up [?abducted] by the Knight of the

Siren after his mission to her brother Ives (3.48) and runs off alone when his horse and hers are killed by Ransald (3:20). We next find her among Queen Galerana's attendants (4.11).

- ^{xi} *savage Kurdistan*: not found, I confess, in Tasso's original, but added here to eke out the rhyme.
- ^{xii} *The Cyprian*: the goddess Venus.
- ^{xiii} *Atlante . . . Zoroaster*: Atlante is the sorcerer who acts as Ruggiero's protector in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*; Zoroaster or Zarathustra is the great magus of ancient Persia.
- ^{xiv} *I myself sought out Clarice . . . lost*: The vagueness of these four lines is suspicious, and may have been meant to suggest that, as a last resort on his failed mission, the Knight of the Siren abducted Clarice, perhaps first disposing of possible witnesses (see note x above).
- ^{xv} In the stanzas that follow, notwithstanding his bow to his friend Danese Cattaneo (see below), one is tempted to imagine that Tasso had in mind the famous equestrian statues by Donatello and Verrocchio in Padua and Venice.
- ^{xvi} *Danese*: Danese Cattaneo; see note **Error! Bookmark not defined.** above.