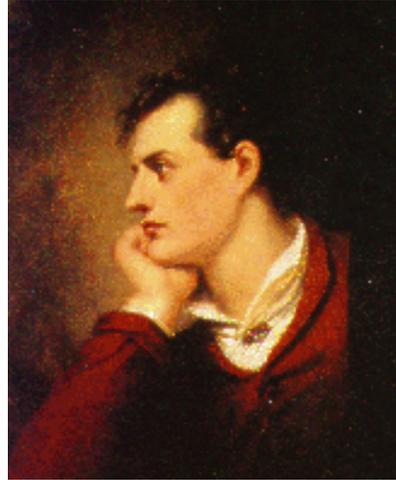


Luigi Pulci: *Morgante Maggiore* Canto I

translated by Byron

Edited by Peter Cochran

See Appendix for a comparison between Byron's translation and that of J.H.Merivale.



Luigi Pulci (1432-84) was court poet to Lorenzo de Medici, whom he also served as a diplomat. He was a polemical antagonist of the philosopher Marsilio Ficino. The burlesque epic *Morgante* is his most important artistic work, though he also wrote prose, sonnets (some of them anti-religious, denying miracles, and the immortality of the soul), lyrics, and verse in terza rima. The *Morgante*, however, stands with Boccaccio's poems at the head of the massive Italian ottava rima serio-comic tradition, whose later practitioners include Berni, Boiardo, Casti, and greatest of them all, Ariosto. The solemn Tasso also employed ottava rima: but no-one has ever accused Tasso of religious levity, a charge often, and with justice, levelled at Pulci (as Byron knew, though he never mentions it).

When Pulci died his body was denied burial in consecrated ground.

The twenty-eight canto *Morgante Maggiore* (1483) is so called to distinguish it from an earlier twenty-canto version (1478), called the *Morgante*, no copies of which are known to survive. On the last day of the Florentine carnival in 1497 it was burned in the Bonfire of the Vanities organised by Savonarola (treatment it shared with works by Petrarch and Boccaccio).¹ Byron admired it greatly, and translated its first Canto, at roughly the same time (late 1819-early 1820) that he wrote Canto III of *Don Juan*. Based loosely on the *Chanson de Roland* and other earlier epics, the poem catalogues many knightly deeds of the Carolingian epoch, whose chief common factor is their improbability.

Don Juan III: Byron and Margutte

Byron's translation was not his first creative tribute to Pulci. In Stanza 45 of *Don Juan* Canto III, a casual reveller tells Lambro that he is more interested in the food and drink than in who's giving the party. The stanza seems to have emerged from Byron's pen and on to the rough draft – where it is numbered 47 – with relative ease. As can be seen below, Byron made only one truly false start – with the second word of the seventh line. He wrote the correct version of the third line hesitantly, then

All Pulci quotations are from Luigi Pulci, *Morgante*, ed. Franca Ageno, Ricciardi (1955). There are discussions of the styles of Pulci and Byron in *Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse* by Claude M. Fuess (New York 1912) pp.144-55; in the introduction to R.D.Waller's edition of Frere's *The Monks and The Giants* (Manchester 1926); by Lindsay Waters in two articles, *The 'Desultory Rhyme' of Don Juan: Byron, Pulci and the Improvisatory Style*, ELH 45 (1978) pp.429-42, and *Pulci and the Poetry of Byron: "Domestic Muse"*, *Annali d'Italianistica* 1 (1983) pp.44-8. I am grateful to David Woodhouse for bringing this volume to my attention: it has a very full bibliography, in which Mark Davie, *Pulci's Margutte Episode Re-Examined*, *Italian Studies* 33 (1978) pp.29-55, is the most immediately relevant article. Other books I have found useful are *Luigi Pulci: Morgante, The Epic Adventures of Orlando and his Giant Friend Morgante*, tr. Joseph Tusiani, int. and notes by Edoardo A. Lebrano, Indiana University Press, 1998; *Luigi Pulci and the Morgante Maggiore* by Lewis Einstein (Berlin 1902) *The Sceptics of the Italian Renaissance* by John Owen (1908, reprinted Kennikat Press, Port Washington 1970) and *Luigi Pulci and the Animal Kingdom* by J.R.Shulters (Baltimore 1920).

1: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, Penguin 1990, p.305. Burckhardt has a good section on Margutte at pp.315-16.

of faith. Stanza 115 – more important structurally to the *Morgante* than Stanza 45 is to *Don Juan* – follows:

Margutte then replied, “Briefly, I believe no more in black than in blue; but in a capon, either boiled or roasted; and sometimes I believe in butter; beer, and new wine when I have some, much more in dry than sweet; but above all, I have faith in good wine, and believe he shall be saved who believes in it.”

The parody-Credo and confession runs on for twenty-seven stanzas, and initially involves promiscuous culinary jokes against the Virgin, the Trinity, the Lord’s Prayer, the Koran, and devil-worship. Faith, says Margutte (XVIII, 117, 3) is like ticklishness: you either have it, or you don’t. He then reveals that he is the son “d’una monaca greca / e d’un papasso in Bursia, là in Turchia” (XVIII, 118, 3-4: “of a Greek nun and a Moslem cleric from Bursa in Turkey”). He claims to be possessed of seventy-seven mortal sins, and lists among them parricide, gambling, cheating, epicurean gluttony, lying, pimping, fornication (with nuns for preference, though one line – XVIII, 132, 2 – punningly indicates a commoner kind of monastic bent) theft, burglary, church-deseccration and blasphemy. “Cattivo insin nell’uovo” (XVIII, 141, 8: “Wicked even from the egg”), he claims – it comes as a bit of an anticlimax – that his one redeeming feature is loyalty (“... tradimento ignun non feci mai”: XVIII, 142, 8).

The passage may be one subtext to Byron’s own parodic “poetical commandments” (*Don Juan* I sts.104-6)

Falstaffian in carnal energy, Byronic in omni-directional facetiousness, Margutte travels with *Morgante* for the rest of the eighteenth canto, and for much of the nineteenth. Assuming chivalric airs (XIX, 37) the two rescue a captive Moslem maiden called Florinetta, who is guarded by a lion and two giants. These they kill (XIX, 7-52) and, journeying on to restore her to her family, further kill, and sometimes cook and consume, a variety of creatures, including a buffalo (XVIII, 155) a unicorn (XVIII, 195) a giant turtle (XIX, 56) a basilisk (XIX, 67: it is Florinetta who suggests that this might make a good meal) an elephant (XIX, 76) and a crocodile (XIX, 109). The supposedly Christian *Morgante* often plays false with his new companion, monopolising the food, and stealing his wine: but admires him, referring to him (XVIII, 199, 7) as “... il maestro di color chi sanno”: Dante’s phrase for Aristotle, at *Inferno* IV 131. Eventually, after Florinetta has been returned home, Margutte wakes up to find that a barbary ape is pulling his boots on and off, and dies in an explosion of laughter (XIX, 147-9).⁷ The joke has been set up by *Morgante*, who weeps sincere buckets at its unforeseen consequence.

Although at one stage he burns down an inn, having pilfered it thoroughly and ridden off on the innkeeper’s camel (subsequently eaten) and although he is profoundly subversive by verbal implication, it is hard to take Margutte as the comprehensively incarnate devil which his confession would have us see. Attilio Momigliano describes him as “un enorme mariolo, immaginato da un poete che non avrebbe fatto male ad una mosca”⁸ – roughly, a great pantomime rogue, imagined by a writer who had never hurt a fly in his life.

The entire episode is an invention without parallel in the earlier epics: Pulci solemnly attributes its climax to an Egyptian writer called Alfamenonne (XIX, 153). It at once sets off and parodies the episodes featuring the ordinary Christian mortals, many of whom themselves spend as much time eating as doing battle: see, for instance, the gluttony of the monks in Stanzas 66 and 67 of Canto I, in Byron’s translation⁹ when *Morgante* unexpectedly brings back two boars for them to eat. Religious faith may be the characters’ ostensible motivation, but fleshly appetite is their actual motivation.

Byron’s attention had first been drawn to Pulci by *Orlando in Roncesvalles*, a version of the *Morgante* by his friend John Herman Merivale, son-in-law of Joseph Drury, the headmaster at Harrow. Published by Murray in 1814, it is an ottava rima rendition of the account of the final battle only, using the last four of Pulci’s twenty-eight cantos. *Morgante* is mentioned only in the notes: Margutte is mentioned nowhere, for Merivale has no time for Pulci’s burlesque intention:

... it is impossible to deny that, in the most serious passages [in the *Morgante*], the reader is often offended by the sudden interposition of low buffoonery or of the grossest profaneness; and the same debasing strain is often continued through several cantos.

7: For discussions, see Ernest H. Wilkins, *Margutte and the Monkey*, MLN 22 (1907) p.28, and Franco Martinelli, *Gli Stivali di Margutte*, *Annali d’Italianistica* Vol. 1 (1983) pp.49-54.

8: Attilio Momigliano, *Studia di Poesia* (Bari 1938) p.39.

9: CPW IV, 272.

Let it [“the author’s ignorance” and “contempt of moral and literary discipline”] then remain among the unexplained and perhaps inexplicable phenomena of the human mind ...¹⁰

Merivale had, in *The Monthly Magazine* for 1806, published two articles on Pulci and the *Morgante*, though it’s not clear that Byron had read them. See Appendix below for the two passages translated by both writers.

Later, Byron – led by Merivale, for whose *Orlando in Roncesvalles* he professed admiration¹¹ – read the fourth volume of the *Histoire Littéraire d’Italie* by Pierre Louis Ginguené formerly French ambassador in Turin. Ginguené devotes his fifth chapter to “Louis Pulci”: severe in his tastes (naturally preferring Tasso) he too apparently finds the Italian’s impiety hard to take:

Je prie qu’on ne se scandalise pas, mais qu’on veuille bien se rappeler mes doutes sur l’emploi sérieux des textes sacrés et des prières qu’on trouve si frèquement dans le poème du Pulci.¹²

However, Ginguené, unlike Merivale, is aware that the poem’s comic element is important, and relates the Margutte episode in some detail:

Morgant était resté en France; il est inutile de dire pourquoi. C’est alors qu’il rencontre cet autre géant nommé Margutte, dont Voltaire a cité quelques traits. Morgant, frappé de sa taille énorme et de sa figure hétéroclite, lui demande qui il est, s’il est chrétien ou sarrazin, s’il croit en J.-C. ou en Mahomet. <<Margutte lui répond: <<A te dire le vrai, je ne crois pas plus au noir qu’au bleu, mais bien au chapon bouilli ou rôti. Je crois encore quelquefois au beurre, à la bière, et, quand j’en ai, au vin doux; mais j’ai foi, par dessus tout, au bon vin, et je crois qui y croit est sauvé. Je crois encore à la tourte et au tourteau; l’une est la mère et l’autre le fils: le vrai *Pater noster* est une tranche de foie grillé; elles peuvent être trois ou deux, ou une seule, et celle-là du moins c’est vraiment du foie qu’elle dérive, etc.>> Je ne fais plus de réflexions [adds Ginguené], je cite, et sans doute cela suffit.¹³

Voltaire had referred to the *Morgante* in his preface to *La Pucelle d’Orléans* (published officially in 1762). Writing under the pseudonym “Don Apuleius Risorius, Bénédictin”, he too had quoted Margutte’s credo and confession – in a cut and selected version, leaving out many stanzas – while describing their author smilingly as “l’écrivain de son temps le plus modeste et le plus mesuré ...”¹⁴ Byron had read Voltaire at school¹⁵ and he makes a comparison between the *Pucelle* and Southey’s *Joan of Arc* in a note to *English Bards*, line 621.

Byron’s first reference to Ginguené is in a letter to Murray of March 5th 1820:¹⁶ we may wonder whether he first encountered Margutte’s credo in the original, in Ginguené’s translation, or in Voltaire. The incident of Morgante and the boars is related by Ginguené, too.¹⁷

The question is, why did Byron bother to write the stanza as a note to one of his own which bears only a peripheral relation to it? The unnamed “fellow” who answers Lambro’s enquiry is perhaps Marguttean in appetite, but not in taste: and it is hard to see what he says as bearing any relationship to the Creed. He does no more in the action of the poem, so his stanza is not introducing us to an important new character. Byron may just have been struck by the distant syntactical echoes between his stanza and Pulci’s: but if this was all, why go to the trouble of copying the Italian out? A prouder sense of continuity is being signalled – except that no-one has ever picked it up. Quoting Margutte, so as to place him implicitly as subtext for the following episode, namely the feast given by Juan and Haidee, is the way Byron chooses of telling us that the world about which Lambro is enquiring – one “innocently” created from his old world by Haidee and her lover – is, like the world of *Don Juan* as a whole, dominated by appetite, not ethic; rollicking flesh, not tight-lipped spirit; dionysiac chaos, not christian harmony. As Margutte’s death laughing at the ape (his mirror-image) implies, man is here far closer to bestiality than to godhead. One does not ask who rules, or where people come from: one merely takes

10: J.H.Merivale, *Orlando in Roncesvalles*, John Murray 1814, pp.xvi-xvii. Merivale is one of the “associate Bards” praised anonymously at *English Bards* l.881.

11: See BLJ IV, 12.

12: P.L. Ginguené, *Histoire Littéraire d’Italie*, Paris 1812, Tom. IVème. p.223. For the Tasso reference, see p.227n.

13: Ibid, pp.228-9.

14: See Voltaire, *La Pucelle d’Orléans*, Preface: *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, Geneva 1970, Volume 7, p.255. The phrase ironically describing Pulci is from *L’Istoria della volgar Poesia* of G.M.Crescimbeni (1730-1).

15: See his juvenile reading list, CMP, 1, 3 and 4.

16: BLJ VII, 54.

17: Ginguené, op.cit., pp.218-19.

from the passing moment whatever gratification it offers. Facetious humour is not just one way of coping with such a world: it is the only really appropriate way.

Certain religious truisms are evidently being queried by both poets: and not moral truisms only. Margutte dies in “una selva ombrosa” (XIX, 144, 4: compare *Inferno*, I, 2) having put Morgante through his second conversion in the poem, and convinced him finally “che in riso e ‘n giuoco s’arrechì ogni cosa” (XIX, 144, 2: “that the source and end of all things is laughter and joking”). Compare *Paradiso*, VII, 73-5:

Più l’è conforme, e però più le piace;
 chè l’ardor santo ch’ogni cosa raggia,
 nella più somigliante é più vivace.

“[That which emanates from The Divine Goodness] is more in conformity with it, and therefore pleases it more: for the holy ardour that irradiates all things is brightest in that which is most like itself.”

Byron, who would not at all have been surprised by the idea of a facetiously humorous power ruling the world, borrows several other ideas from Pulci: as Peter Vassallo points out,¹⁸ line 198 of *The Vision of Judgement* – in which St. Peter sweats – is derived from *Morgante* XXVI, 91; and the reaction of the Devil to Waterloo at Stanza 6 of the same poem derives from, but is very different from, the reactions of Eaco, Minós, Rodamanta, Satàn and Caron to the battle of Roncisvalle in XXVI, 90. Cain’s mind-expanding voyage round the universe with Lucifer in Act II seems to come in part from the airy trip taken by the knights Rinaldo and Ricciardetto with the devils Astarotte and Farferello, in Pulci’s Canto XXV: Astarotte – a theologically-minded devil, after Byron’s own heart – gives them a startling pre-Columbian description of the world’s global configuration (XXV, 228 – 232); encouraged, writes Ugo Foscolo¹⁹ by Paolo Toscanelli, the mathematician who, in his old age, encouraged Columbus.

However, before all these later matters have got under way, Morgante himself has followed Margutte to wherever flesh-loving giants go:²⁰ he dies from a poisonous crab-bite, shortly after having saved the Christian fleet by killing (although not eating) a whale (XX, 45-57).

Byron’s translation of Canto I

Byron made his translation between October 29th 1819 and February 20th 1820. He was very proud of it:

I think my translation of Pulci will make you stare – it must be put by the original stanza for stanza and verse for verse – and you will see what was permitted in a Catholic <cun> country and a bigotted age {to a Churchman} on the score of religion; – and so tell those buffoons who accuse me of attacking the liturgy. – –²¹

The play [*Faliero*] as you will – the Dante too – but the Pulci I am proud of – it is superb – you have no such translation – It is the best thing I ever did in my life.²²

I have finished my translation of the first Canto of the “Morgante Maggiore” of Pulci – which I will transcribe and send – it is the parent not only of Whistlecraft – but of all jocose Italian poetry. – – You must print it side by side with the original Italian because I wish the reader to judge of the fidelity – it is stanza for stanza – and often line for line if not word for word. – – – – –²³

Pulci is my favourite – that is my translation – I think it the acme of putting one language into another. – – –²⁴

18: Peter Vassallo, *Byron: the Italian Literary Influence*, Macmillan 1984, p.159.

19: See *Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians*, *Quarterly Review*, April 1819, p.523. Foscolo glances at Margutte at the bottom of p.525.

20: Rabelais had the answer to this query. At *Gargantua and Pantagruel* II 30, “Morgant, brasseur de bière” appears amongst those in hell.

21: Byron to Murray, February 7th 1820: (Source: NLS Acc.12604 / 4160D; BLJ VII 34-5)

22: Byron to Murray, September 28th 1820: (Source: NLS Acc.12604 / 4160D; BLJ VII 182-4)

23: Byron to Murray, February 21st 1820: (Source: text from NLS Acc.12604 / 4160D; BLJ VII 41-4).

24: Byron to Murray, August 7th 1820: (Source: NLS Acc.12604 / 4160D; BLJ VII 150).

But John Murray never published it. It appeared in *The Liberal* No 4, on July 30th 1823, over three years after it had been written. Murray had written to Byron:

Probably you will tell me if we shall print the Translation from Pulci, with its facing Italian at the end of the Volume. With regard to what your Lordship says as to what was permitted in a Catholic & bigoted age to a Clergyman – I humbly conceive & am surprised that you do not perceive that – religion had nothing to do with it – It was Manners – and they have changed – A<a> man might as well appear without Cloaths – and quote our Saxon Ancestors – The Comedies of Charles<s> Seconds days are not tolerated now – and even in my Own time I have gradually seen my favourite Love for Love absolutely pushed by public feeling – from the stage – it is not affectation of morality but the real progress and result of refinement – and <we> {our minds} can no more undergo the moral & religious grossness of our predecessors that our bodies can sustain the heavy Armour which they wore –²⁵

It is very hard in 2009 to see the source either of Byron's defiant defence of the translation, or of Murray's objections to it. Few if any doctrines are discussed in it, let alone queried (as they are in later cantos of the *Morgante*). The monks are portrayed as gluttonous in stanzas 66 and 67, but one would think this hardly blasphemous, even by the canting standards of 1820. Morgante's "conversion to Christianity" (45, 8) is extremely rapid, but he's a simpleton, and subjecting him to systematic catechism him would be a challenge. It's true that the very first stanza uses ideas from the opening of St. John's gospel, but it's impossible to gauge, even in the Italian, if Pulci is being facetious, and no easier in Byron's version.

The distance between our post-Python ease with jocular Christianity, Jesus and jokes, and the canting standards of 1820 is hard to bridge. It was the very fact of placing a holy man next to a rock-hurling giant which gave offence – so tenuous was the confidence of the Established Church in the face of the threats, real or imagined, from Methodism, Catholicism, Jacobinism, Cuvier, and so on.

E.H.Coleridge writes,

That which attracted Byron to Pulci's writings was, no doubt, the co-presence of faith, a certain *simplicity* of faith, with a an audacious and even outrageous handling of the objects of faith, combined with a facile and wanton alternation of romantic passion with a cynical mockery of whatever things are sober and venerable. *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment* owe their existence to the *Morgante Maggiore*.²⁶

Murray, indifferent as he was to such things, may have been covering the fact that he didn't think the poem marketable. Either that, or he sensed that Anglicanism was by 1820 so insecure and paranoid that the merest whiff of scepticism would be read as an excitement to disestablishment.

Think of Jane Austen's Mr Collins reading the *Morgante*.

The clerical establishment (mouthpiece: the *Quarterly Review*; proprietor: John Murray) decreed that base buffoonery and low expressions were out of place in poetry – their presence in Shakespeare himself was much regretted, and his Porters and Gravediggers were rarely seen on stage. As for coarse language, we have only to remember Dr Johnson "scarce able to check his risibility" when Lady Macbeth speaks of the ministers of darkness "peeping through a blanket". Pulci in the *Morgante*, and Byron in *Don Juan*, offended these class-based criteria. The *Morgante* was properly consigned, for its publication, to the ungentlemanly radical John Hunt.

J.H.Merivale, in one of his 1806 articles, had explained that, low as some of Pulci's language might seem, it had in reality a most respectable pedigree:

The humour of those ages, when the world was only struggling to break through the darkness of ignorance by which it was enveloped, was also of a peculiar stamp. The common proverbs and maxims which are now so vulgar, and suggest nothing but the lowest ideas, because they are constantly in the mouths of the meanest people, were the invention of those days, and owed their origin to the native wit and judgment of poets and philosophers.²⁷

Byron does not excuse his poet's low humour and vulgar language in this way. How he would excuse it, if pressed, we cannot say, for no-one was interested enough in the question to press him.

25: Murray to Byron, March 7th 1820: (Source: text from NLS Acc.12604 / 4161C; LJM 310-1).

26: Coleridge IV 280.

27: John Herman Merivale, *Account of the Morgante of Luigi Pulci*, *Monthly Magazine*, May 1st 1806, p.305.

Jerome McGann praises the translation;²⁸ few other commentators have given it much attention, perhaps because Byron has, with self-effacing professionalism, refrained from lacing it with too much Juanesque wit.

In his edition, E.H. Coleridge is dismissive: “There is no resemblance whatever between Byron’s laboured and faithful rendering of the text, and Merivale’s far more readable paraphrase [in *Orlando in Roncesvalles*]”.²⁹

Byron’s intention in translating the *Morgante* was to advertise the long Southern European tradition of which his supposedly heterodox *Don Juan* was the latest offshoot: but what with John Murray’s indifference, and the indifference of the reception given to *The Liberal* when the translation was finally brought out in it, his gesture fell on unreceptive ground.

MORGANTE MAGGIORE DI MESSER LUIGI PULCI. ADVERTISEMENT.

THE *Morgante Maggiore*, of the first canto of which this translation is offered, divides with the *Orlando Innamorato* the honour of having formed and suggested the style and story of Ariosto. The great defects of Boiardo were his treating too seriously the narratives of chivalry, and his harsh style. Ariosto, in his continuation, by a judicious mixture of the gaiety of Pulci, has avoided the one, and Berni, in his reformation of Boiardo’s poem, has corrected the other. Pulci may be considered as the precursor and model of Berni altogether, as he has partly been to Ariosto, however inferior to both his copyists. He is no less the founder of a new style of poetry very lately sprung up in England. I allude to that of the ingenious Whistlecraft. The serious poems on Roncesvalles in the same language, and more particularly the excellent one of Mr. Merivale, are to be traced to the same source. It has never yet been decided entirely, whether Pulci’s intention was or was not to deride the religion, which is one of his favourite topics. It appears to me, that such an intention would have been no less hazardous to the poet than to the priest, particularly in that age and country; and the permission to publish the poem, and its reception among the classics of Italy, prove that it neither was nor is so interpreted. That he intended to ridicule the monastic life, and suffered his imagination to play with the simple dulness of his converted giant, seems evident enough; but surely it were as unjust to accuse him of irreligion on this account, as to denounce Fielding for his Parson Adams, Barnabas, Thwackum, Supple, and the Ordinary in Jonathan Wild, or Scott, for the exquisite use of his Covenanters in “Tales of my Landlord.”

In the following translation I have used the liberty of the original with the proper names; as Pulci uses Gan, Ganellon, or Ganellone; Carlo, Carlomagno, or Carlomano; Rondel, or Rondello, &c. as it suits his convenience, so has the translator. In other respects the version is faithful to the best of the translator’s ability in combining his interpretation of the one language with the not very easy task of reducing it to the same versification in the other. The reader, on comparing it with the original, is requested to remember that the antiquated language of Pulci, however pure, is not easy to the generality of Italians themselves, from its great mixture of Tuscan proverbs; and he may therefore be more indulgent to the present attempt. How far the translator has succeeded, and whether or no he shall continue the work, are questions which the public will decide. He was induced to make the experiment partly by his love for, and partial intercourse with, the Italian language, of which it is so easy to acquire a slight knowledge, and with which it is so nearly impossible for a foreigner to become accurately conversant. The Italian language is like a capricious beauty, who accords her smiles to all, her favours to few, and sometimes least to those who have courted her longest. The translator wished also to present in an English dress a part at least of a poem never yet rendered into a northern language; at the same time that it has been the original of some of the most so celebrated productions on this side of the Alps, as well as of those recent experiments in poetry in England, which have been already mentioned.

28: CPW IV 509.

29: Coleridge IV 279-80.

CANTO I

ARGUMENT

While Charlemagne, the Emperor is living
 With all his Paladins in feast and glee,
 Orlando, 'gainst the traitor Gano giving
 Way to his wrath, departs for Paganie,
 And saves an Abbey, in a wild arriving, 5
 All from the beastly rage of Giants three,
 Slays two of them, and with Morgante ends
 In goodly fellowship by making friends.

1.³⁰

IN the beginning was the Word next God;
 God was the Word, the Word no less was he: 10
 This was in the beginning, to my mode
 Of thinking, and without him nought could be:
 Therefore, just Lord! from out thy high abode,
 Benign and pious, bid an angel flee,
 One only, to be my companion, who 15
 Shall help my famous, worthy, old song through.

2.

And thou, oh Virgin! daughter, mother, bride,
 Of the same Lord, who gave to you each key
 Of heaven, and hell, and every thing beside,
 The day thy Gabriel said, "All hail!" to thee, 20
 Since to thy servants pity's ne'er denied,
 With flowing rhymes, a pleasant style and free,
 Be to my verses then benignly kind,
 And to the end illuminate my mind.

3.

'Twas in the season when sad Philomel 25
 Weeps with her sister,³¹ who remembers and
 Deplores the ancient woes which both befell,
 And makes the nymphs enamour'd, to the hand
 Of Phæton by Phœbus³² loved so well
 His car (but temper'd by his sire's command) 30
 Was given, and on the horizon's verge just now
 Appear'd, so that Tithonus scratched his brow:³³

4.

When I prepared my bark first to obey,
 As it should still obey, the helm, my mind,
 And carry prose or rhyme, and this my lay 35
 Of Charles the Emperor,³⁴ whom you will find
 By several pens already praised; but they
 Who to diffuse his glory were inclined,
 For all that I can see in prose or verse,
 Have understood Charles badly – and wrote worse. 40

5.

30: For this stanza, compare John 1: 1-3.

31: For the story of Philomel and her sister Procne, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. VI.

32: Phæton lost control of the chariot-horses of the sun; Phœbus was their usual, safe driver.

33: Tithonus was husband to Eos, the dawn goddess; he aged while she remained youthful.

34: Charlemagne, in whose days the *Morgante* is theoretically set.

Leonardo Aretino³⁵ said already,
 That if, like Pepin, Charles had had a writer
 Of genius quick, and diligently steady,
 No hero would in history look brighter;
 He in the cabinet being always ready, 45
 And in the field a most victorious fighter,
 Who for the church and Christian faith had wrought,
 Certes far more than yet is said or thought.

6.
 You still may see at Saint Liberatore,
 The abbey no great way from Manopell,³⁶ 50
 Erected in the Abruzzi to his glory,
 Because of the great battle in which fell
 A Pagan King, according to the story,
 And felon people whom Charles sent to hell:
 And there are bones so many, and so many, 55
 Near them Giusaffa's³⁷ would seem few, if any.

7.
 But the world, blind and ignorant, don't prize
 His virtues as I wish to see them: thou,
 Florence, by his great bounty dost³⁸ arise,
 And hast, and may have, if thou wilt allow, 60
 All proper customs and true courtesies:
 Whate'er thou hast acquired from then till now,
 With knightly courage, treasure, or the lance,
 Is sprung from out the noble blood of France.

8.
 Twelve Paladins had Charles in court, of whom 65
 The wisest and most famous was Orlando;
 Him traitor Gan³⁹ conducted to the tomb
 In Roncesvalles, as the villain plann'd too,
 While the horn rang so loud,⁴⁰ and knell'd the doom
 Of their sad rout, though he did all knight can do, 70
 And Dante in his comedy has given
 To him a happy seat with Charles in heaven.⁴¹

9.
 'Twas Christmas-day; in Paris all his court
 Charles held; the chief, I say, Orlando was;
 The Dane, Astolfo there too did resort, 75
 Also Ansuigi, the gay time to pass
 In festival and in triumphal sport,
 The much renown'd St. Dennis being the cause;
 Angiolin of Bayonne, and Oliver
 And gentle Berlinghieri too came there: 80

10.
 Avolio, and Avino, and Othone
 Of Normandy, and Richard Paladin,

35: Aretino was a fifteenth-century Chancellor of Florence, and the city's historian.

36: Charlemagne was said to have fought a battle against Saracens at Manopello near Pescara.

37: Giusaffa is Jehoshephat, site of the Last Judgement.

38: The rough Ms. seems to read "don't", which makes no sense.

39: Gan (Gano, Ganelon), villain of the *Chanson de Roland*, will betray Orlando (Roland) to the Saracens at Roncesvalles.

40: Compare *Don Juan X*, final line.

41: See Dante, *Paradiso XVIII* 43.

- Wise Namo, and the ancient Salemon,
 Walter of Lion's Mount and Baldwin,
 Who was the son of the sad Ganellone, 85
 Were there, exciting too much gladness in
 The son of Pepin:⁴² – when his knights came hither,
 He groaned with joy to see them altogether.
11.
 But watchful Fortune lurking, takes good heed
 Ever some bar 'gainst our intents to bring. 90
 While Charles reposed him thus, in word and deed,
 Orlando ruled court, Charles, and every thing;
 Curst Gan, with envy bursting, had such need
 To vent his spite, that thus with Charles the king,
 One day he openly began to say, 95
 "Orlando must we always then obey?"
12.
 "A thousand times I've been about to say,
 Orlando too presumptuously goes on;
 Here are we, counts, kings, dukes, to own thy sway,
 Namo, and Otho, Ogier, Solomon, 100
 Each have to honour thee and to obey;
 But he has too much credit near the throne,
 Which we won't suffer, but are quite decided
 By such a boy to be no longer guided.
13.
 "And even at Aspramont thou didst begin 105
 To let him know he was a gallant knight,
 And by the fount did much the day to win;
 But I know who that day had won the fight
 If it had not for good Gherardo been:
 The victory was Almonte's else; his sight 110
 He kept upon the standard, and the laurels
 In fact and fairness are his earning, Charles.
14.
 "If thou rememberest being in Gascony,
 When there advanced the nations out of Spain,
 The Christian cause had suffer'd shamefully, 115
 Had not his valour driven them back again.
 Best speak the truth when there's a reason why:
 Know then, oh Emperor! that all complain:
 As for myself, I shall repass the mounts
 O'er which I cross'd with two and sixty Counts. 120
15.
 'Tis fit thy grandeur should dispense relief,
 So that each here may have his proper part,
 For the whole court is more or less in grief:
 Perhaps thou deem'st this lad a Mars in heart?"
 Orlando one day heard this speech in brief, 125
 As by himself it chanced he sate apart
 Displeas'd he was with Gan because he said it,
 But much more still that Charles should give him credit.
- 16.

42: Pepin was father to Charlemagne.

And with the sword he would have murder'd Gan,
 But Oliver thrust in between the pair, 130
 And from his hand extracted Durlindan,
 And thus at length they separated were.
 Orlando, angry too with Carloman,
 Wanted but little to have slain him there;
 Then forth alone from Paris went the chief, 135
 And burst and madden'd with disdain and grief.

17.

From Ermellina, consort of the Dane,
 He took Cortana,⁴³ and then took Rondell,⁴⁴
 And on towards Brava prick'd him o'er the plain;
 And when she saw him coming, Aldabelle 140
 Stretch'd forth her arms to clasp her lord again:
 Orlando, in whose brain all was not well,
 As "Welcome my Orlando home," she said,
 Rais'd up his sword to smite her on the head.

18.

Like him a fury counsels; his revenge 145
 On Gan in that rash act he seem'd to take,
 Which Aldabella thought extremely strange,
 But soon Orlando found himself awake;
 And his spouse took his bridle on this change,
 And he dismounted from his horse, and spake 150
 Of every thing which pass'd without demur,
 And then reposed himself some days with her.

19.

Then full of wrath departed from the place,
 And far as Pagan countries roam'd astray,
 And while he rode, yet still at every pace 155
 The traitor Gan remember'd by the way;
 And wandering on in error a long space
 An abbey which in a lone desert lay,
 'Midst glens obscure, and distant lands, he found,
 Which form'd the Christian's and Pagan's bound. 160

20.

The abbot was call'd Clermont, and by blood
 Descended from Angrante: under cover
 Of a great mountain's brow the abbey stood,
 But certain savage giants look'd him over;
 One Passamont was foremost of the brood, 165
 And Alabaster and Morgante hover
 Second and third, with certain slings, and throw
 In daily jeopardy the place below.

21.

The monks could pass the convent gate no more,
 Nor leave their cells for water or for wood; 170
 Orlando knock'd, but none would ope, before
 Unto the prior it at length seem'd good;
 Enter'd, he said that he was taught to adore
 Him who was born of Mary's holiest blood,
 And was baptized a Christian; and then show'd 175

43: Cortana is Orlando's sword.

44: Rondello is Orlando's horse.

How to the abbey he had found his road.

22.

Said the abbot, "You are welcome; what is mine
 We give you freely, since that you believe
 With us in Mary Mother's Son divine;
 And that you may not, cavalier, conceive 180
 The cause of our delay to let you in
 To be rusticity, you shall receive
 The reason why our gate was barr'd to you:
 Thus those who in suspicion live must do.

23.

"When hither to inhabit first we came 185
 These mountains, albeit that they are obscure,
 As you perceive, yet without fear or blame
 They seem'd to promise an asylum sure:
 From savage brutes alone, too fierce to tame,
 'Twas fit our quiet dwelling to secure; 190
 But now, if here we'd stay, we needs must guard
 Against domestic beasts with watch and ward.

24.

"These make us stand, in fact, upon the watch,
 For late there have appear'd three giants rough;
 What nation or what kingdom bore the batch 195
 I know not, but they are all of savage stuff;
 When force and malice with some genius match,
 You know, they can do all – *we* are not enough:
 And these so much our orisons derange,
 I know not what to do, till matters change. 200

25.

"Our ancient fathers living the desert in,
 For just and holy works were duly fed;
 Think not they feed on locusts sole, 'tis certain
 That manna was rained down from heaven instead;
 But here 'tis fit we keep on the alert in 205
 Our bounds, or taste the stones shower'd down for bread,
 From off yon mountain daily raining faster,
 And flung by Passamont and Alabaster.

26.

"The third, Morgante's savagest by far; he
 Plucks up pines, beeches, poplar-trees, and oaks, 210
 And flings them, our community to bury,
 And all that I can do but more provokes."
 While thus they parley in the cemetery,
 A stone from one of their gigantic strokes,
 Which nearly crush'd Rondell, came tumbling over, 215
 So that he took a long leap under cover.

27.

"For God sake, cavalier, come in with speed,
 The manna's falling now," the abbot cried:
 "This fellow does not wish my horse should feed,
 Dear abbot," Roland unto him replied,
 "Of restiveness he'd cure him had he need; 220
 That stone seems with good-will and aim applied."
 The holy father said, "I don't deceive;

They'll one day fling the mountain, I believe."

28.

Orlando bade them take care of Rondello, 225
 And also made a breakfast of his own:
 "Abbot," he said, "I want to find that fellow
 Who flung at my good horse yon corner-stone."
 Said the abbot, "Let not my advice seem shallow,
 As to a brother dear I speak alone; 230
 I would dissuade you, baron, from this strife,
 As knowing sure that you will lose your life.

29.

"That Passamont has in his hand three darts
 Such slings, clubs, ballast-stones, that yield you must;
 You know that giants have much stouter hearts 235
 Than us, with reason, in proportion just;
 If go you will, guard well against their arts,
 For these are very barbarous and robust."
 Orlando answer'd, "This I'll see, be sure,
 And walk the wild on foot to be secure." 240

30.

The abbot sign'd the great cross on his front,
 "Then go you with God's benison and mine":
 Orlando, after he had scaled the mount,
 As the abbot had directed, kept the line
 Right to the usual haunt of Passamont: 245
 Who, seeing him alone in this design,
 Survey'd him fore and aft with eyes observant,
 Then asked him, "If he wish'd to stay as servant?"

31.

And promised him an office of great ease.
 But, said Orlando, "Saracen insane! 250
 I come to kill you, if it shall so please
 God, not to serve as footboy in your train;
 You with his monks so oft have broke the peace –
 Vile dog! 'tis past his patience to sustain."
 The giant ran to fetch his arms, quite furious,
 When he received an answer so injurious. 255

32.

And being return'd to where Orlando stood,
 Who had not moved him from the spot, and swinging
 The cord, he hurl'd a stone with strength so rude,
 As show'd a sample of his skill in slinging; 260
 It roll'd on Count Orlando's helmet good
 And head, and set both head and helmet ringing,
 So that he swoon'd with pain as if he died,
 But more than dead, he seem'd so stupefied.

33.

Then Passamont, who thought him slain outright, 265
 Said, "I will go, and while he lies along,
 Disarm me: why such craven did I fight?"
 But Christ his servants ne'er abandons long,
 Especially Orlando, such a knight,
 As to desert would almost be a wrong. 270
 While the giant goes to put off his defences,

Orlando has recall'd his force and senses:

34.

And loud he shouted, "Giant, where dost go?
 Thou thought'st me doubtless for the bier outlaid;
 To the right about – without wings thou'rt too slow 275
 To fly my vengeance – currish renegade!
 'Twas but by treachery thou laid'st me low."
 The giant his astonishment betray'd,
 And turn'd about, and stopp'd his journey on,
 And then he stoop'd to pick up a great stone. 280

35.

Orlando had Cortana bare in hand,
 To split the head in twain was what he schem'd:
 Cortana clave the skull like a true brand,
 And Pagan Passamont died unredeem'd.
 Yet harsh and haughty, as he lay he bann'd, 285
 And most devoutly Macon⁴⁵ still blasphemed;
 But while his crude, rude blasphemies he heard,
 Orlando thank'd the Father and the Word,

36.

Saying, "What grace this day to me thou'st given!
 And I to thee, Oh Lord! am ever bound. 290
 I know my life was saved by thee from heaven,
 Since by the giant I was fairly down'd.
 All things by thee are measured just and even;
 Our power without thine aid would nought be found:
 I pray thee take heed of me, till I can
 At least return once more to Carloman." 295

37.

And having said thus much, he went his way;
 And Alabaster he found out below,
 Doing the very best that in him lay
 To root from out a bank a rock or two. 300
 Orlando, when he reach'd him, loud 'gan say,
 "How think'st thou, glutton, such a stone to throw?"
 When Alabaster heard his deep voice ring,
 He suddenly betook him to his sling,

38.

And hurl'd a fragment of a size so large, 305
 That if it had in fact fulfill'd its mission,
 And Roland not avail'd him of his targe,
 There would have been no need of a physician.
 Orlando set himself in turn to charge,
 And in his bulky bosom made incision 310
 With all his sword. The lout fell; but, o'erthrown, he
 How'ever by no means forgot Macone.

39.

Morgante had a palace in his mode,
 Composed of branches, logs of wood, and earth,
 And stretch'd himself at case in this abode, 315
 And shut himself at night within his birth.
 Orlando knock'd, and knock'd, again to goad

45: Macon and / or Mahound were thought to be devils worshipped by the Moslems.

The giant from his sleep; and he came forth,
The door to open, like a crazy thing,
For a rough dream had shook him slumbering. 320

40.

He thought that a fierce serpent had attack'd him,
And Mahomet he call'd, but Mahomet
Is nothing worth, and not an instant back'd him;
But praying blessed Jesu, he was set
At liberty from all the fears which rack'd him; 325
And to the gate he came with great regret –
Who knocks here?" grumbling all the while, said he:
"That," said Orlando, "you will quickly see.

41.

"I come to preach to you, as to your brothers,
Sent by the miserable monks – repentance; 330
For Providence divine, in you and others,
Condemns the evil done my new acquaintance.
'Tis writ on high – your wrong must pay another's;
From heaven itself is issued out this sentence;
Know then, that colder now than a pilaster 335
I left your Passamont and Alabaster."

42.

Morgante said, "O gentle cavalier!
Now by thy God say me no villany;
The favour of your name I fain would hear,
And if a Christian, speak for courtesy." 340
Replied Orlando, "So much to your ear
I by my faith disclose contentedly;
Christ I adore, who is the genuine Lord,
And, if you please, by you may be adored."

43.

The Saracen rejoin'd in humble tone, 345
"I have had an extraordinary vision;
A savage serpent fell on me alone,
And Macon would not pity my condition;
Hence to thy God, who for ye did atone
Upon the cross, preferr'd I my petition; 350
His timely succour set me safe and free,
And I a Christian am disposed to be."

44.

Orlando answer'd, "Baron just and pious,
If this good wish your heart can really move
To the true God, who will not then deny us 355
Eternal honour, you will go above,
And, if you please, as friends we will ally us,
And I will love you with a perfect love.
Your idols are vain liars full of fraud,
The only true God is the Christian's God. 360

45.

"The Lord descended to the virgin breast
Of Mary Mother, sinless and divine;
If you acknowledge the Redeemer blest,
Without whom neither sun nor star can shine,
Abjure bad Macon's false and felon text, 365

Your renegado God, and worship mine, –
Baptize yourself with zeal, since you repent.”
To which Morgante answer’d, “I’m content.”

46.

And then Orlando to embrace him flew,
And made much of his convert, as he cried, 370
To the abbey I will gladly marshal you:”
To whom Morgante, “Let us go,” replied,
I to the friars have for peace to sue.””
Which thing Orlando heard with inward pride,
Saying, “My brother, so devout and good, 375
Ask the abbot pardon, as I wish you would:

47.

Since God has granted your illumination,
Accepting you in mercy for his own,
Humility should be your first oblation.”
Morgante said, “For goodness’ sake make known – 380
Since that your God is to be mine – your station,
And let your name in verity be shown,
Then will I every thing at your command do.”
On which the other said, he was Orlando.

48.

“Then, quoth the giant, “blessed be Jesu, 385
A thousand times with gratitude and praise!
Oft, perfect Baron! have I heard of you
Through all the different periods of my days:
And, as I said, to be your vassal too
I wish, for your great gallantry always.” 390
Thus reasoning, they continued much to say,
And onwards to the abbey went their way.

49.

And by the way, about the giants dead
Orlando with Morgante reasoned:
“Be, for their decease, I pray you, comforted, 395
And, since it is God’s pleasure, pardon me.
A thousand wrongs unto the monks they bred,
And our true Scripture soundeth openly –
Good is rewarded, and chastised the ill,
Which the Lord never faileth to fulfil: 400

50.

“Because his love of justice unto all
Is such, he wills his judgment should devour
All who have sin, however great or small;
But good he well remembers to restore:
Nor without justice holy could we call 405
Him, whom I now require you to adore:
All men must make his will their wishes sway,
And quickly and spontaneously obey.

51.

“And here our doctors are of one accord,
Coming on this point to the same conclusion, – 410
That in their thoughts who praise in heaven the Lord,
If pity e’er was guilty of intrusion
For their unfortunate relations stored

In hell below, and damn'd in great confusion,
 Their happiness would be reduced to nought, 415
 And thus unjust the Almighty's self be thought.

52.

"But they in Christ have firmest hope, and all
 Which seems to him, to them too must appear
 Well done; nor could it otherwise befall; 420
 He never can in any purpose err:
 If sire or mother suffer endless thrall,
 They don't disturb themselves for him or her;
 What pleases God to them must joy inspire; –
 Such is the observance of the eternal choir."

53.

"A word unto the wise," Morgante said, 425
 "Is wont to be enough, and you shall see
 How much I grieve about my brethren dead;
 And if the will of God seem good to me,
 Just, as you tell me, 'tis in heav'n obey'd –
 Ashes to ashes, – merry let us be! 430
 I will cut off the hands from both their trunks,
 And carry them unto the holy monks.

54.

"So that all persons may be sure and certain
 That they are dead, and have no farther fear
 To wander solitary this desert in, 435
 And that they may perceive my spirit clear
 By the Lord's grace, who hath withdrawn the curtain
 Of darkness making his bright realm appear,
 He cut his brethren's hands off at these words,
 And left them to the savage beasts and birds. 440

55.

Then to the abbey they went on together,
 Where waited them the abbot in great doubt.
 The monks, who knew not yet the fact, ran thither
 To their superior, all in breathless rout,
 Saying, with tremor, "Please to tell us whether 445
 You wish to have this person in or out?"
 The abbot, looking through upon the giant,
 Too greatly fear'd, at first, to be compliant.

56.

Orlando, seeing him thus agitated,
 Said quickly, "Abbot, be thou of good cheer; 450
 He Christ believes, as Christian must be rated,
 And hath renounced his Macon false";
 Which Morgante with the hands corroborated,
 A proof of both the giants' fate quite clear:
 Thence, with due thanks, the abbot God adored, 455
 Saying, "Thou hast contented me, oh Lord!"

57.

He gazed; Morgante's height he calculated,
 And more than once contemplated his size;
 And then he said, "Oh giant celebrated,
 Know, that no more my wonder will arise, 460
 How you could tear and fling the trees you late did,

When I behold your form with my own eyes.
 You now a true and perfect friend will show
 Yourself to Christ, as once you were a foe.

58.

“And one of our apostles, Saul once named, 465
 Long persecuted sore the faith of Christ,
 Till one day by the Spirit being inflamed,
 “Why dost thou persecute me thus?” said Christ;
 And then from his offence he was reclaimed,
 And went for ever after preaching Christ; 470
 And of the faith became a trump, whose sounding
 O’er the whole earth is echoing and rebounding.

59.

“So, my Morgante, you may do likewise;
 He who repents, thus writes the Evangelist,
 Occasions more rejoicing in the skies 475
 Than ninety-nine of the celestial list.
 You may be sure, should each desire arise
 With just zeal for the Lord, that you’ll exist
 Among the happy saints for evermore;
 But you were lost and damn’d to hell before!” 480

60.

And thus great honour to Morgante paid
 The abbot: many days they did repose.
 One day, as with Orlando they both stray’d,
 And saunter’d here and there, where’er they chose,
 The abbot show’d a chamber, where array’d 485
 Much armour was, and hung up certain bows;
 And one of these Morgante for a whim
 Girt on, though useless, he believ’d, to him.

61.

There being a want of water in the place,
 Orlando, like a worthy brother, said, 490
 “Morgante, I could wish you in this case
 To go for water.” “You shall be obey’d
 In all commands,” was the reply, “straightways.”
 Upon his shoulder a great tub he laid,
 And went out on his way unto a fountain, 495
 Where he was wont to drink below the mountain.

62.

Arrived there, a prodigious noise he hears,
 Which suddenly along the forest spread;
 Whereat from out his quiver he prepares
 An arrow for his bow, and lifts his head; 500
 And lo! a monstrous herd of swine appears,
 And onward rushes with tempestuous tread,
 And to the fountain’s brink precisely pours,
 So that the giant’s join’d by all the boars.

63.

Morgante at a venture shot an arrow, 505
 Which pierced a pig precisely in the ear,
 And pass’d unto the other side quite thorough,
 So that the boar, defunct, lay tripp’d up near.
 Another, to revenge his fellow farrow,

Against the giant rush'd in fierce career, 510
 And reach'd the passage with so swift a foot,
 Morgante was not now in time to shoot.

64.

Perceiving that the pig was on him close,
 He gave him such a punch upon the head *
 As floor'd him, so that he no more arose – 515
 Smashing the very bone; and he fell dead
 Next to the other. Having seen such blows,
 The other pigs along the valley fled;
 Morgante on his neck the bucket took,
 Full from the spring, which neither swerved nor shook. 520

Byron's note: * "Gli dette in sulla testa un gran punzone." It is strange that Pulci should have literally anticipated the technical terms of my old friend and master Jackson, and the art which he has carried to its highest pitch. "*A punch on the head,*" "*or a punch in the head,*" "*un punzone in sulla testa,*" is the exact and frequent phrase of our best pugilists, who little dream that they are talking the purest Tuscan. – *The Liberal*, IV, p.216.

65.

The tun was on one shoulder, and there were
 The hogs on t'other, and he brush'd apace
 On to the abbey, though by no means near,
 Nor spilt one drop of water in his race.
 Orlando, seeing him so soon appear 525
 With the dead boars, and with that brimful vase,
 Marvell'd to see his strength so very great;
 So did the abbot, and set wide the gate.

66.

The monks, who saw the water fresh and good,
 Rejoiced, but much more to perceive the pork; 530
 All animals are glad at sight of food:
 They lay their breviaries to sleep, and work
 With greedy pleasure, and in such a mood,
 That the flesh needs no salt beneath their fork.
 Of rankness and of rot there is no fear, 535
 For all the fasts are now left in arrear.

67.

As though they wish'd to burst at once, they ate;
 And gorged so that, as if the bones had been
 In water, sorely grieved the dog and cat,
 Perceiving that they all were pick'd too clean. 540
 The abbot, who to all did honour great,
 A few days after this convivial scene,
 Gave to Morgante a fine horse well train'd
 Which he long time had for himself maintain'd.

68.

The horse Morgante to a meadow led, 545
 To gallop, and to put him to the proof,
 Thinking that he a back of iron had,
 Or to skim eggs unbroke was light enough;
 But the horse, sinking with the pain, fell dead,
 And burst, while cold on earth lay head and hoof. 550
 Morgante said, "Get up, thou sulky cur!"
 And still continued pricking with the spur.

69.

But finally he thought fit to dismount,
 And said, "I am as light as any feather,
 And he has burst – to this what say you, Count?" 555
 Orlando answered, "Like a ship's mast rather
 You seem to me, and with the truck for front:
 Let him go; Fortune wills that we together
 Should march, but you on foot, Morgante still."
 To which the giant answered, "So I will. 560

70.

When there shall be occasion, you will see
 How I approve my courage in the fight."
 Orlando said, "I really think you'll be,
 If it should prove God's will, a goodly knight,
 Nor will you napping there discover me: 565
 But never mind your horse, though out of sight
 'Twere best to carry him into some wood,
 If but the means or way I understood.

71.

The giant said, "Then carry him I will,
 Since that to carry me he was so slack – 570
 To render, as the gods do, good for ill;
 But lend a hand to put him on my back."
 Orlando answer'd, "If my counsel still
 May weigh, Morgante, do not undertake
 To lift or carry this dead courser, who, 575
 As you have done to him, will do to you.

72.

"Take care he don't revenge himself, though dead,
 As Nessus⁴⁶ did of old beyond all cure;
 I don't know if the fact you've heard or read,
 But he will make you burst, you may be sure. 580
 "But help him on my back," Morgante said,
 "And you shall see what weight I can endure:
 In place, my gentle Roland, of this palfrey,
 With all the bells, I'd carry yonder belfry."

73.

The abbot said, "The steeple may do well, 585
 But, for the bells, you've broken them, I wot."
 Morgante answered, "Let them pay in hell
 The penalty, who lie dead in yon grot";
 And hoisting up the horse from where he fell,
 He said, "Now look if I the gout have got, 590
 Orlando, in the legs – or if I have force" –
 And then he made two gambols with the horse.

74.

Morgante was like any mountain framed;
 So if he did this, 'tis no prodigy;
 But secretly himself Orlando blamed, 595
 Because he was one of his family;
 And fearing that he might be hurt or maim'd,
 Once more he bade him lay his burthen by:
 "Put down, nor bear him further the desert in."

46: It was the poisoned shirt of Nessus which killed Herakles (Nessus being by then dead).

Morgante said, "I'll carry him for certain." 600

75.

He did; and stow'd him in some nook away,
 And to the abbey then return'd with speed.
 Orlando said, "Why longer do we stay?
 Morgante, here is nought to do indeed."
 The abbot by the hand he took one day, 605
 And said with great respect, he had agreed
 To leave his reverence; but for this decision
 He wish'd to have his pardon and permission.

76.

The honours they continued to receive
 Perhaps exceeded what his merits claim'd: 610
 He said, "I mean, and quickly, to retrieve
 The lost days of time past, which may be blam'd;
 Some days ago I should have ask'd your leave,
 Kind father, but I really was ashamed,
 And know not how to show my sentiment, 615
 So much I see you with our stay content.

77.

"But in my heart I bear through every clime,
 The abbot, abbey, and this solitude
 So much I love you in so short a time;
 For me, from heaven reward you with all good, 620
 The God so true, the eternal Lord sublime!
 Whose kingdom at the last hath open stood:
 Meanwhile we stand expectant of your blessing,
 And recommend us to your prayers with pressing."

81.

Now when the abbot Count Orlando heard, 625
 His heart grew soft with inner tenderness,
 Such fervour in his bosom bred each word
 And, "Cavalier," he said, "if I have less
 Courteous and kind to your great worth appear'd,
 Than fits me for such gentle blood to express, 630
 I know I've done too little in this case;
 But blame our ignorance, and this poor place.

79.

"We can indeed but honour you with masses,
 And sermons, thanksgivings, and pater-nosters
 Not suppers, dinners (fitting other places) 635
 In verity much rather than the cloisters);
 But such a love for you my heart embraces,
 For thousand virtues which your bosom fosters,
 That wheresoe'er you go, I too shall be,
 And, on the other part, you rest with me. 640

80.

"This may involve a seeming contradiction,
 But you I know are sage, and feel, and taste,
 And understand my speech with full conviction.
 For your just pious deeds may you be graced
 With the Lord's great reward and benediction, 645
 By whom you were directed to this waste:
 To his high mercy is our freedom due,

For which we render thanks to him and you.

81.

You saved at once our life and soul: such fear
 The giants caused us, that the way was lost 650
 By which we could pursue a fit career
 In search of Jesus and the saintly host;
 And your departure breeds such sorrow here,
 That comfortless we all are to our cost;
 But months and years you could not stay in sloth, 655
 Nor are you form'd to wear our sober cloth;

82.

“But to bear arms and wield the lance; indeed,
 With these as much is done as with this cowl,
 In proof of which the Scripture you may read.
 This giant up to heaven may bear his soul 660
 By your compassion: now in peace proceed.
 Your state and name I seek not to unroll,
 But, if I'm ask'd, this answer shall be given,
 That here an angel was sent down from heaven.

83.

“If you want armour or aught else, go in, 665
 Look o'er the wardrobe, and take what you choose,
 And cover with it o'er this giant's skin.”
 Orlando answered, “If there should lie loose
 Some armour, ere our journey we begin,
 Which might be turn'd to my companion's use, 670
 The gift would be acceptable to me.”
 The abbot said to him, “Come in and see.”

84.

And in a certain closet, where the wall
 Was cover'd with old armour like a crust,
 The abbot said to them, “I give you all.” 675
 Morgante rummaged piecemeal from the dust
 The whole, which, save one cuirass,⁴⁷ was too small,
 And that too had the mail inlaid with rust.
 They wonder'd how it fitted him exactly,
 Which ne'er has suited others so compactly. 680

47: The translation here caused B. some pains: ‘In the translation I wish you to ask Rose about the word Sbergo’ i.e. Usbergo which I have translated Cuirass – I suspect that it means <both> helmet also – now if so – which of the senses is best accordant with the text? – I have adopted Cuirass – but will be amenable to reasons. – Of The Natives some say one and some t’other, but they are no great Tuscans, in Romagna – however I will ask Sgricci (the famous Improvisatore) tomorrow – who is a native of Arezzo – The Countess Guiccioli – – who is reckoned a very cultivated young lady – and the dictionary – say Cuirass – I have written Cuirass – but helmet runs in my head nevertheless – and will run in verse very well whilk is the principal point. – – I will ask the “Sposa Spina Spinelli” too, the Florentine bride of Count Gabriel Rasponi just imported from Florence – and get the sense out of Somebody. – – –’ (Byron to Murray, March 1st 1820: NLS Acc.12604 / 4160D; BLJ VII 47-9). And again: ‘It is strange that here nobody understands the real precise meaning of “Sbergo” or “Usbergo” – an old Tuscan word which I have rendered Cuirass <which> (but am not sure it is not Helmet)⁴⁷ I have asked at least twenty people – learned and ignorant – male and female – including poets and officers civil and military. – The Dictionary says Cuirass – but gives no authority – and a female friend of mine says positively Cuirass – which makes me doubt the fact still more than before. – Ginguene says “bonnet de Fer” <but> with the usual superficial decision of a Frenchman – so that I can’t believe him – and what between The Dictionary – the Italian woman – and the Frenchman – there is no trusting to a word they say – The Context too which should decide admits of either meaning equally as you will perceive – Ask Rose – Hobhouse – Merivale – and Foscolo – and vote with the Majority – is Frere a good Tuscan? if he be bother him too – I have tried you see to be as accurate as I well could –’ (Byron to Murray, March 5th 1820: NLS Acc.12604 / 4160D; BLJ VII 54)

85.

'Twas an immeasurable giant's, who
 By the great Milo of Angrante⁴⁸ fell
 Before the abbey many years ago.
 The story on the wall was figured well;
 In the last moment of the abbey's foe, 685
 Who long had waged a war implacable:
 Precisely as the war occur'd they drew him,
 And there was Milo as he overthrew him.

86.

Seeing this history, Count Orlando said
 In his own heart, "Oh God! who in the sky 690
 Know'st all things, how was Milo hither led?
 Who caused the giant in this place to die?"
 And certain letters, weeping, then he read,
 So that he could not keep his visage dry,
 As I will tell in the ensuing story. 695
 From evil keep you the high King of Glory!

END OF THE FIRST CANTO.

Appendix: the partial translation of John Herman Merivale, compared with Byron's.

39.

Merivale: Morgante had a rustic palace made
 Of sticks, earth, leaves, in his own barbarous way,
 And here at ease his mighty members laid,
 Securely guarded, at the close of day.
 Orlando knocked; the giant, fore dismay'd,
 Waked from the heavy sleep in which he lay;
 And, when he open'd, like a thing astound,
 Scared by a frightful dream, he gazed around.

39.

Byron: Morgante had a palace in his mode,
 Composed of branches, logs of wood, and earth,
 And stretch'd himself at ease in this abode,
 And shut himself at night within his birth.
 Orlando knock'd, and knock'd, again to goad
 The giant from his sleep; and he came forth,
 The door to open, like a crazy thing,
 For a rough dream had shook him slumbering.

40.

Merivale: He thought s furious serpent had assail'd him;
 And, when to Mahound for relief he pray'd,
 That nought his Pagan deity avail'd him;
 But, when Christ's holy name he called for aid,
 Straightway the serpent's wonted fury fail'd him.
 Waked from his dream, towards the door he made –
 "Who knocks?" with rough and grumbling voice he cried.
 "Soon shalt thou know –" the Paladin replied.

40

Byron: He thought that a fierce serpent had attack'd him,
 And Mahomet he call'd, but Mahomet
 Is nothing worth, and not an instant back'd him;

48: Milo of Angrante was Orlando's father.

But praying blessed Jesu, he was set
 At liberty from all the fears which rack'd him; 325
 And to the gate he came with great regret –
 Who knocks here?" grumbling all the while, said he:
 "That," said Orlando, "you will quickly see.

41.

Merivale: "I come to make thee, as I have before
 Thy brothers, for thy sins do penitence;
 Sent by those monks unfortunate and poor,
 And guarded by celestial Providence.
 Your wicked hands have long assail'd them fore,
 And now Heaven's justice waits on your offence.
 Know, that already, as the marble cold,
 Lie Passamont and Alabaster bold.

41.

Byron: "I come to preach to you, as to your brothers,
 Sent by the miserable monks – repentance; 330
 For Providence divine, in you and others,
 Condemns the evil done my new acquaintance.
 'Tis writ on high – your wrong must pay another's;
 From heaven itself is issued out this sentence;
 Know then, that colder now than a pilaster 335
 I left your Passamont and Alabaster."

42.

Merivale: "Oh Knight," Morgante said, "Oh gentle knight,
 By thine own God, I charge thee, tell me fair,
 Rede me in courtesy thy name aright,
 And, if a Christian, oh the truth declare!"
 Orlando answer'd, "By this holy light,
 And by my faith (a sacred oath) I swear,
 Christ I adore, my master just and true –
 Serve him thyself; and all thy crimes eschew." (*Monthly Magazine*, July 1st
 1906, pp.511-2)

42.

Byron: Morgante said, "O gentle cavalier!
 Now by thy God say me no villany;
 The favour of your name I fain would hear,
 And if a Christian, speak for courtesy." 340
 Replied Orlando, "So much to your ear
 I by my faith disclose contentedly;
 Christ I adore, who is the genuine Lord,
 And, if you please, by you may be adored."

84.

Merivale: Into a secret cabinet they came,
 With antient armour piled upon the ground.
 "All these," the Abbot said, "my friend may claim."
 Morgante views them all, and handles round;
 But nothing seem'd to suit his giant frame,
 Save one old coat of mail with rust embrown'd.
 Much does he wonder, when the mail he tries,
 To find it fit exactly to his size.

84.

Byron: And in a certain closet, where the wall

Was cover'd with old armour like a crust,
 The abbot said to them, "I give you all."
 Morgante rummaged piecemeal from the dust
 The whole, which, save one cuirass, was too small,
 And that too had the mail inlaid with rust.
 They wonder'd how it fitted him exactly,
 Which ne'er has suited others so compactly.

85.

Merivale: This cuirass once a monstrous giant wore,
 Within the precincts of the abbey slain
 By Milo, great Angrante's chief of yore,
 (Unless the story I have heard be vain.)
 The pictur'd walls the whole adventure bore,
 How their huge foe was humbled on the plain;
 The cruel war he waged was there display'd
 And there was Milo's knightly form pourtray'd.

85.

Byron: 'Twas an immeasurable giant's, who
 By the great Milo of Angrante fell
 Before the abbey many years ago.
 The story on the wall was figured well;
 In the last moment of the abbey's foe,
 Who long had waged a war implacable:
 Precisely as the war occur'd they drew him,
 And there was Milo as he overthrew him.

86.

Merivale: This painted story when the count beheld,
 With wonder he survey'd the varied scene,
 How Milo there arriv'd, and how he quell'd
 The mighty giant fearful and obscene.
 His heart with tender recollections swell'd,
 And, as he read, the tears gush'd forth between.
 For never till that moment did he hear
 This noble action of the reverend Peer. (*Monthly Magazine*, July 1st 1906,
 p.512)]

86.

Byron: Seeing this history, Count Orlando said
 In his own heart, "Oh God! who in the sky
 Know'st all things, how was Milo hither led?
 Who caused the giant in this place to die?"
 And certain letters, weeping, then he read,
 So that he could not keep his visage dry,
 As I will tell in the ensuing story.
 From evil keep you the high King of Glory!