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MORGANTE MAGGIORE

DI

MESSER LUIGI PULCI.*[1]

ADVERTISEMENT.

The Morgante Maggiore, of the first canto of which this translation is offered, divides with the Orlando Innamorato[2] the honour of having formed and suggested the style and story of Ariosto.[3] The great defects of Boiardo[4] 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,[5] 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

* Author: Lord Byron / Transcribed by Carmen Gallo; Annotated by Alessandra Crotti.

of the ingenious Whistlecraft.[6] The serious poems on Roncesvalles in the same language, and more particularly the excellent one of Mr. Merivale,[7] 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[8] 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[9] for his Parson Adams, Barnabas,[10] Thwackum, Supple,[11] and the Ordinary in Jonathan Wild,[12]—or Scott,[13] for the exquisite use of his Covenanters in the "Tales of my Landlord."[14]

In the following translation I have used the liberty of the original with the proper names; as Pulci uses Gan, Ganellon, or Ganellone;[15] Carlo, Carlomagno, or Carlomano;[16] Rondel, or Rondello,[17] &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 annexed 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 celebrated productions on this side of the Alps, as well as of those recent experiments in poetry in England, which have been already mentioned.

TRANSLATION.

MORGANTE MAGGIORE.

CANTO I.

I.

In the beginning was the Word next God;
  God was the Word, the Word no less was he:[18]
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
Shall help my famous, worthy, old song through.

II.

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,
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.

III.

'Twas in the season when sad Philomel[19]
Weeps with her sister, who remembers and
Deplores the ancient woes which both befell,
And makes the nymphs enamour'd, to the hand
Of Phæton[20] by Phœbus[21] loved so well
His car (but temper'd by his sire's command)
Was given, and on the horizon's verge just now
Appear'd, so that Tithonus[22] scratched his brow:

IV.

When I prepared my bark first to obey,[23]
As it should still obey, the helm, my mind,
And carry prose or rhyme, and this my lay
Of Charles the Emperor,[24] 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,[25]
Have understood Charles badly—and wrote worse.

V.

Leonardo Aretino[26] said already,
That if, like Pepin,[27] Charles had had a writer
Of genius quick, and diligent steady,
No hero would in history look brighter;
He in the cabinet being always ready,
And in the field a most victorious fighter,
Who for the church and Christian faith had wrought,[28]
Certes far more than yet is said or thought.

VI.

You still may see at Saint Liberatore,[29]
The abbey no great way from Manopell,
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,
Near them Giusaffa's[30] would seem few, if any.

VII.

But the world, blind and ignorant, don't prize
His virtues as I wish to see them: thou,
Florence, by his great bounty don't arise,[31]
And hast, and may have, if thou wilt allow,
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.

VIII.

Twelve Paladins[32] had Charles in court, of whom
The wisest and most famous was Orlando;[33]
Him traitor Gan[34] conducted to the tomb
In Roncesvalles, as the villain plann'd too,
While the horn rang so loud, and knell'd the doom
Of their sad rout, though he did all knight can do,
And Dante[35] in his comedy has given
To him a happy seat with Charles in heaven.[36]

IX.

'Twas Christmas-day; in Paris all his court
Charles held; the chief, I say, Orlando was,
The Dane;[37] Astolfo[38] there too did resort,
Also Ansuigi,[39] the gay time to pass
In festival and in triumphal sport,
The much renown'd St. Dennis[40] being the cause;
Angiolin of Bayonne,[41] and Oliver,[42]
And gentle Belinghieri[43] too came there:

X.

Avolio, and Arino,[44] and Othone
Of Normandy,[45] and Richard Paladin,
Wise Hamo,[46] and the ancient Salemone,[47]
Walter of Lion's Mount[48] and Baldovin,[49]
Who was the son of the sad Ganellone,
Were there, exciting too much gladness in
The son of Pepin:[50]—when his knights came hither,
He groaned with joy to see them altogether.

XI.

But watchful Fortune lurking, takes good heed
Ever some bar 'gainst our intents to bring.
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,
"Orlando must we always then obey?

XII.

"A thousand times I've been about to say,
"Orlando too presumptuously goes on;
"Here are we, counts, kings, dukes, to own thy sway,
"Hamo,[51] and Otho,[52] Ogier,[53] Solomon,[54]
"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.

XIII.

"And even at Aspramont[55] thou didst begin
"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[56] been:
"The victory was Almonte's[57] else; his sight
"He kept upon the standard, and the laurels
"In fact and fairness are his earning, Charles.

XIV.

"If thou rememberest being in Gascony,
"When there advanced the nations out of Spain,
"The Christian cause had suffer'd shamefully,
"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.

XV.

"'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[58] in heart?"
Orlando one day heard this speech in brief,
As by himself it chanced he sate apart:
Displeased he was with Gan because he said it,
But much more still that Charles should give him credit.

XVI.

And with the sword he would have murder'd Gan,
But Oliver thrust in between the pair,
And from his hand extracted Durlindan,[59]
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,
And burst and madden'd with disdain and grief.

XVII.

From Ermellina, consort of the Dane,
He took Cortana,[60] and then took Rondell,
And on towards Brara[61] prick'd him o'er the plain;
And when she saw him coming, Aldabelle[62]
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.

XVIII.

Like him a fury counsels; his revenge
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[63]
Of every thing which pass'd without demur,
And then reposed himself some days with her.

XIX.

Then full of wrath departed from the place,
And far as Pagan countries roam's astray,
And while he rode, yet still at every pace
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 the Pagan's bound.

XX.

The abbot was call'd Clermont, and by blood
Descended from Angrante:[64] 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,
And Alabaster and Morgante hover
Second and third, with certain slings, and throw
In daily jeopardy the place below.

XXI.

The monks could pass the convent gate no more,
Nor leave their cells for water or for wood;
Orlando knock'd, but none would ope,[65] 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,[66]
And was baptized a Christian; and then show'd
How to the abbey he had found his road.

XXII.

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
"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.

XXIII.

"When hither to inhabit first we came
"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;
"But now, if here we'd stay, we needs must guard
"Against domestic beasts with watch and ward.

XXIV.

"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
"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.

XXV.

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

XXVI.

"The third, Morgante, 's savagest by far; he
"Plucks up pines, beeches, poplar-trees, and oaks,
"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,
So that he took a long leap under cover.

XXVII.

"For God sake, cavalier, come in with speed,
"The manna's[67] 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;
"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."

XXVIII.

Orlando bade them take care of Rondello,
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;
"I would dissuade you, baron, from this strife,
"As knowing sure that you will lose your life.

XXIX.

"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
"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."

XXX.

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;
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?"

XXXI.

And promised him an office of great ease.
But, said Orlando, "Saracen insane!
"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.

XXXII.

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;
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.

XXXIII.

Then Passamont, who thought him slain outright,
  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.
While the giant goes to put off his defences,
Orlando has recall'd his force and senses:

XXXIV.

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
  "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.

XXXV.

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 unreseem'd.
Yet harsh and haughty, as he lay he bann'd,
And most devoutly Macon[68] still blasphemed;
But while his crude, rude blasphemies he heard,
Orlando thank'd the Father and the Word,—

XXXVI.

Saying, "What grace to me thou'st given!
"And I to thee, Oh Lord! am ever bound.
"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."

XXXVII.

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.
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,

XXXVIII.

And hurl'd a fragment of a size so large,
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
With all his sword. The lout fell; but, o'erthrown, he
However by no means forgot Macone.

XXXIX.

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.

XL.

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;
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.

XLI.

"I come to preach to you, as to your brothers,
"Sent by the miserable monks—repentance;
"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
"I left your Passamont and Alabaster."

XLII.

Morgante said, "O gentle cavalier!
"Now by thy God say me no villany;[69]
"The favour of your name I fain would hear,
"And if a Christian, speak for courtesy."
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."

XLIII.

The Saracen rejoin'd in humble tone,
"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;
"His timely succour set me safe and free,
"And I a Christian am disposed to be."

XLIV.

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
"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.

XLV.

"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 test,
"Your renegado God, and worship mine,—
"Baptize yourself with zeal, since you repent."
To which Morgante answer'd, "I'm content."

XLVI.

And then Orlando to embrace him flew,
And made much of his convert, as he cried,
"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,
"Ask the abbot pardon, as I wish you would:

XLVII.

"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—
"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.

XLVIII.

"Then," quoth the giant, "blessed be Jesu,
"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."
Thus reasoning, they continued much to say,
And onwards to the abbey went their way.

XLIX.

And by the way, about the giants dead
Orlando with Morgante reasoned; "Be,
"For their decease, I pray you, comforted,
"And, since it is God's pleasure, pardon me.
"A thousand wrongs unto the monks they bred,
"And our true Scripture[70] soundeth openly—
"Good is rewarded, and chastised the ill,
"Which the Lord never faileth to fulfil:

L.

"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
"Him, whom I now require you to adore:
"All men must make his will their wishes sway,
"And quickly and spontaneously obey.

LI.

"And here our doctors are of one accord,
"Coming on this point to the same conclusion,—
"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,
"And thus unjust the Almighty's self be thought.

LII.

"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;
"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."

LIII.

"A word unto the wise," Morgante said,
"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,[71]—merry let us be!
"I will cut off the hands from both their trunks,
"And carry them unto the holy monks.

LIV.

"So that all persons may be sure and certain
"That they are dead, and have no farther fear
"To wander solitary this desert in,
"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.

LV.

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
"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.

LVI.

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

LVII.

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,
"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.

LVIII.

"And one of our apostles, Saul[72] once named,
"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;
"And of the faith became a trump, whose sounding
"O'er the whole earth is echoing and rebounding.

LIX.

"So, my Morgante, you may do likewise;
"He who repents, thus writes the Evangelist,—
"Occasions more rejoicing in the skies
"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!"

LX.

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,
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.

LXI.

There being a want of water in the place,
Orlando, like a worthy brother, said,
"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,
Where he was wont to drink below the mountain.

LXII.

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;
And lo! a monstruous 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.

LXIII.

Morgante at a venture shot an arrow,
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,
And reach'd the passage with so swift a foot,
Morgante was not now in time to shoot.

LXIV.

Perceiving that the pig was on him close,
He gave him such a punch upon the head*

"*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,[73] 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.

As floor'd him, so that he no more arose—
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.

LXV.

The ton 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
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.

LXVI.

The monks, who saw the water fresh and good,
Rejoiced, but much more to perceive the pork;—
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,
For all the fasts are now left in arrear.

LXVII.

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.
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.

LXVIII.

The horse Morgante to a meadow led,
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.
Morgante said, "Get up, thou sulky cur!"
And still continued pricking with the spur.

LXIX.

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?"
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.

LXX.

"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:
"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."

LXXI.

The giant said, "Then carry him I will,
"Since that to carry me he was so slack—
"To render, as the gods do, good for ill;
"But lend a hand to place 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,
"As you have done to him, will do to you.

LXXII.

"Take care he don't revenge himself, though dead,
"As Nessus[74] 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."
"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."

LXXIII.

The abbot said, "The steeple may do well,
"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,
"Orlando, in the legs—or if I have force;"—
And then he made two gambols with the horse.

LXXIV.

Morgante was like any mountain framed;
So if he did this, 'tis no prodigy;
But secretly himself Orlando blamed,
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."
Morgante said, "I'll carry him for certain."

LXXV.

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,
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.

LXXVI.

The honours they continued to receive
Perhaps exceeded what his merits claim'd:
He said, "I mean, and quickly, to retreive[75]
"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,
"so much I see you with our stay content.

LXXVII.

"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,
"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."

LXXVIII.

Now when the abbot Count Orlando heard,
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,
"I know I've done too little in this case;
"But blame out ignorance, and this poor place.

LXXIX.

"We can indeed but honour you with masses,
"And sermons, thanksgivings, and pater-nosters
"Hot suppers, dinners (fitting other places
"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.

LXXX.

"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,
"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.

LXXXI.

"You saved at once our life and soul: such fear
"The giants caused us, that the way was lost
"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,
"Nor are you form'd to wear our sober cloth;

LXXXII.

"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
"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.

LXXXIII.

"If you want armour or aught else, go in,
"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,
"The gift would be acceptable to me."
The abbot said to him, "Come in and see."

LXXXIV.

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.

LXXXV.

'Twas an immeasurable giant's, who
By the great Milo of Agrante[76] 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 occurr'd they drew him,
And there was Milo as he overthrew him.

LXXXVI.

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!

END OF THE FIRST CANTO.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] Luigi Pulci (1432-84), Italian poet. His main artistic endeavour was the epic poem *Morgante*, which follows the deeds of Emperor Charlemagne's twelve Paladins. The title character is the converted giant Morgante, who becomes Orlando's loyal friend in the Canto selected by Lord Byron for translation. The first version of Cantos I-XXV appeared in 1478 and was printed by Luca Veneziano in 1481. The second version, known as *Morgante Maggiore*, appeared in 1483 and consists of twenty-eight cantos. In terms of style, Pulci employed the *ottava rima*, or eight-line stanza, favoured by Italian satirical writers of mock-heroic romances such as Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto; the *ottava rima* was later employed by Lord Byron in his satirical works *Beppo: A Venetian Story* (1818) and, most notably, *Don Juan* (1819-24).

[2] *Orlando innamorato* (1495), epic poem by Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441-94). Largely based on materials from the Carolingian and Arthurian cycles, it narrates the adventures of the knight Orlando in his pursuit of beautiful Angelica, daughter of the king of Cathay.

[3] Reference to *Orlando furioso* (1516) by Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533). This epic poem was originally conceived as a continuation (*gionta*) of Boiardo's unfinished *Orlando innamorato*. However, Ariosto's thematic innovations and ironic tone set *Orlando furioso* apart from Boiardo's poem, which, as Byron points out in his "Advertisement" to the translation of *Morgante Maggiore*, treated "too seriously the narratives of chivalry".

[4] Boiardo, Italian Renaissance poet.

[5] Francesco Berni (1497-1535), Italian poet. Berni owed his fame mainly to his recasting (*rifacimento*) of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* (1531), in which, as Byron observes in his "Advertisement", he perfected Boiardo's "harsh language", replacing the rugged style and vernacular traces of the original text with elegant and polished Italian. In 1830, Boiardo's original text was newly discovered at the British Museum Library by librarian Antonio Panizzi (1797-1879) and reprinted in London in 1831.

[6] Narratorial persona of John Hookham Frere (1769-1846), English author and diplomat. He wrote the mock-heroic Arthurian poem *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work, by William and Robert Whistlecraft* (1817), which had a transformative role in the definition of Byron's style.

[7] John Herman Merivale (1779-1844), English man of letters. Merivale was part of Byron's social circle; the latter warmly praised him for both his translations and his poem *Orlando in Roncesvalles* (1814), founded upon Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* and written in *ottava rima*.

[8] Archaic spelling of *dullness*.

[9] Henry Fielding (1707-54), English novelist and playwright. Known mainly for his use of humour and satire, he is considered one of the founding fathers of the English novel. His main works include the novels *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749).

[10] Parson Abraham Adams and clergyman Mr. Barnabas are characters in Fielding's picaresque novel *Joseph Andrews*.

[11] Thwackum – who claims to value Religion above all else – and Parson Supple are characters in Fielding's comic novel *Tom Jones*.

[12] The fictional church officer of *The Life and Death of the Late Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1743), a satiric novel by Fielding.

[13] Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) is regarded as the founder of the historical novel. Among his major works are the novels *Waverley* (1814) and *Ivanhoe* (1819).

[14] *Tales of my Landlord* is a series of novels by Scott published between 1816 and 1832. The second volume of the first series, entitled *The Tale of Old Morality* (1816), describes the military campaign against a Covenanting army that had risen against Charles II, thus reflecting Scott's long-standing interest in seventeenth-century civil and ecclesiastical conflicts.

[15] Ganelon (Gano, Ganelon, Ganellone) is a fictional character of *La Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100), an eleventh-century *chanson de geste* about the adventures of the Frankish paladin Roland (or Orlando) during the reign of Charlemagne. The name Ganelon comes from the Italian *inganno*, meaning *deception*, and foreshadows his betrayal of Charlemagne's army to the Saracens.

[16] Charlemagne (c. 747-814), king of the Franks and emperor of the Carolingian Empire. His story provides much of the material for the Matter of France or Carolingian cycle, a body of medieval literature associated with the early history of France.

[17] Orlando's horse in Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*.

[18] Biblical reference: see *John* 1.1-5.

[19] Philomela is an Athenian princess of Greek mythology raped and mutilated by Tereus, her sister's husband. After being avenged by the killing of Tereus' son, Philomela is changed into a nightingale, whose song, heard especially in springtime, is depicted as exceedingly beautiful and sorrowful. She often features as a symbol in literary, musical and artistic works.

[20] Phaeton is the mortal son of the sun god Helios in Greek mythology. In order to prove his divine lineage, Phaethon travels far east to Helios' palace. Despite his father's advice against it, he drives the chariot of the sun through the sky and, unable to control its horses, flies too close to the Earth, scorching it. In order to prevent further damage, Zeus strikes Phaethon with a thunderbolt.

[21] Phoebus Apollo, the Greek god of light, poetry, music, healing, and prophecy. In his *Metamorphoses*, the Roman poet Ovid identifies Apollo with the sun god, his epithet Phoebus meaning *bright* or *pure*.

[22] Tithonus was a minor character in Greek mythology, lover of Eos, the Goddess of Dawn. He was a *rhapsode*, that is, a professional performer of epic poetry in classical Greece.

[23] Reference to the patron Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-92) and his mother, the poetess Lucrezia Tornabuoni (1425-82), who commissioned *Morgante* to Luigi Pulci.

[24] Charlemagne, early medieval king of the Franks.

[25] The story of Charlemagne was recorded by the scholars and historiographers Alcuin (735-804) and Einhard (c. 770-840), as well as Turpin, the alleged author of *Historia Caroli Magni*, which provided the materials for later elaborations of Charlemagne's life.

[26] Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), Italian writer and politician also known as Leonardo Aretino. Bruni is often considered the first modern historian and foremost humanist of the early Renaissance. In his *Istoria Fiorentina* (1610), Bruni commemorates the figure of Charlemagne and recalls his charitable deeds in favour of the church.

[27] Pepin the Short (714-68), king of the Franks from 751 to 768. He was the first king of the Carolingian dynasty and father of Charlemagne.

[28] In 773-74, Charlemagne fought a war against the king of the Lombards, freeing Italy from their domination. Possible reference to Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*: *Paradiso* VI.94-96.

[29] The Benedictine Monastery of San Liberatore alla Maiella is one of the oldest abbeys of Italy's Abruzzo region, located south of Manoppello. A body of legends links its foundation to Charlemagne.

[30] The Valley of Josaphat is a Biblical place mentioned in *Joel* (3.2 and 3.12). In the fourth century CE, the Biblical valley was traced back to the area of Cedron and became a burial ground.

[31] Misprint. Byron probably wrote *dost arise*, recalling the supposed restoration of Florence by Charlemagne.

[32] In the Matter of France, the paladins are Charlemagne's twelve closest companions akin to the Knights of the Round Table in the Arthurian cycle or Christ's twelve Apostles. They appear alongside Charlemagne and his army against the Saracens at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass, caused by Ganelon's treachery, where they die heroically.

[33] Roland, spelled Orlando in later Italian sources. In *La Chanson de Roland*, Ganelon conspires with Marsile, the Islamic ruler of Saragossa, to ambush the rearguard of the Frankish led by Roland at the Roncevaux Pass. When the Saracens appear, the soldiers of the rearguard ask Roland to signal for help from Charlemagne's army using Oliphant, his great war-horn. Roland refuses, believing that the rearguard could defeat the Muslim hordes on its own. However, the Saracens outnumber Roland's troops, most of whom are killed. As Roland decides to use his war-horn, he blows so hard that his temples burst, leaving him fatally wounded.

[34] Character who betrays Charlemagne's army to the Saracens in *La Chanson de Roland*.

[35] Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Italian poet, author of *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308-21).

[36] Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*: *Paradiso* XXVIII.43-45. Cacciaguida points at the spirits who, in life, had fought for the Christian faith; among them are Charlemagne and his paladin Orlando.

[37] Allusion to Ogier the Dane, one of Charlemagne's paladins in many Old French *chansons de geste*.

[38] Astolfo is Orlando's cousin and one of Charlemagne's paladins in the Matter of France.

[39] Ansuigi is a fictional character in Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*.

[40] Denis of Paris, patron saint of France.

[41] One of Charlemagne's paladins in Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*. He dies in Ronceveaux, pierced by King Marsile's sword.

[42] Oliver is a legendary knight in the Matter of France and Orlando's closest friend and confidant. They die together at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass.

[43] Misprint for *Berlinghieri*. In the Matter of France, he often appears together with his brothers Avino, Avolio and Othone.

[44] Misprint for *Avino*.

[45] Berlinghieri's brothers in the Matter of France.

[46] Naimon, Duke of Bavaria. He is a fictional character in several *chansons de geste*, where he is traditionally depicted as Charlemagne's wisest and most trusted advisor.

[47] In the Bible Solomon is a king and prophet often depicted as wise and powerful.

[48] Untraced reference.

[49] Ganelon's son in the Matter of France.

[50] Reference to Charlemagne, son of Pepin the Short.

[51] Naimon, Duke of Bavaria, a fictional character in several *chansons de geste*.

[52] Othone, Berlinghieri's brother.

[53] Ogier the Dane, one of Charlemagne's paladins.

[54] Solomon, Biblical figure.

[55] Reference to the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, a twelfth-century *chanson de geste* and prologue to *La Chanson de Roland*. The Saracen king Agolant and his son Aumon invade the south of Italy. In Aspremont, young Orlando saves Charlemagne's life by defying dangerous Aumon with a rod. Charlemagne knights Orlando, girding him with Aumon's horse and sword, Durlindan.

[56] Girart de Fraite, a legendary figure in the Carolingian cycle. In the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, he appears as Charlemagne's powerful ally.

[57] Aumon, son of the Saracen king Agolant. In the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, he tries to take Charlemagne's life.

[58] Mars, the god of war in ancient Roman religion and mythology.

[59] In the Carolingian cycle, Durlindan or Durendal is Orlando's sword.

[60] Curtana is Ogier the Dane's sword in the Carolingian cycle.

[61] Misprint. Byron must have written *Brava*, Italian for Blaye, a small French town which hosts a tomb popularly attributed to Orlando, known in *La Chanson de Roland* as Roland de Blaye.

[62] Aldabella, Oliver's sister and Orlando's wife in the *Chanson de Roland*.

[63] Old form of the past simple of the verb *to speak*.

[64] Milone d'Angrante, Orlando's father and uncle of the abbot Clermont.

[65] Archaic form of the verb *open*.

[66] Reference to Jesus Christ, son of the Virgin Mary.

[67] In the Bible, manna is described as the miraculous food provided for the Israelites by God. In *Exodus* 16, it is described as appearing on the ground like dew in the morning, having come down from the heavens overnight.

[68] Macon, antagonistic deity worshipped by Pagans in Italian chivalric poems. The name Macon is sometimes used as another epithet for the Islamic prophet Mohammed.

[69] Old form of the noun *villainy*.

[70] Sacred or religious writings considered authoritative by a particular faith tradition.

[71] Reference to a passage from the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer (1549).

[72] Paul the Apostle, also known as Saul of Tarsus (c. 4 BCE-c. 62/4 CE). According to the Bible (*Acts*), Paul was an active persecutor of the first disciples of Jesus. On his way to Damascus, he was suddenly dazzled by a blinding light and a vision of the risen Christ. After his sight was restored, Paul converted to Christianity.

[73] John Jackson (1769-1845), English pugilist. Lord Byron, a passionate follower of boxing, was Jackson's student and referred to him as the Emperor of Pugilism.

[74] Nessus, a Thessalian centaur of Greek mythology. Nessus is fatally wounded by a poisoned arrow shot by Heracles, as he tries to violate Heracles' wife Deianira while ferrying her across a river. In order to have his revenge, Nessus tells Deianira that his blood, now infected by poison, would ensure Heracles' eternal faithfulness to her. Years later, Deianira spreads Nessus' blood on Heracles' robe, causing him to die in agony.

[75] Misprint for *retrieve*.

[76] Milone d'Angrante, Orlando's father.