THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO

ORLANDO FURIOSO

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Orlando Furioso

Translated with an Introduction by

GUIDO WALDMAN

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But in a farther age shall rise along
  The banks of Po two greater still than he;
  The world which smiled on him shall do them wrong
Till they are ashes, and repose with me.
  The first will make an epoch with his lyre,
  And fill the earth with feats of chivalry:
His fancy like a rainbow, and his fire,
  Like that of Heaven, immortal, and his thought
  Borne onward with a wing that cannot tire;
Pleasure shall, like a butterfly new caught,
  Flutter her lovely pinions o'er his theme,
  And Art itself seem into Nature wrought
By the transparency of his bright dream.

BYRON *Prophecy of Dante*, Canto Three

(Dante prophesies the advent after Petrarch of Ariosto and Tasso)

INTRODUCTION

I. Ludovico Ariosto: The Poet and his Times

Niccolò Ariosto, a lesser nobleman in the service of the Estes of Ferrara, had ten children, in the eldest of whom (born at Reggio Emilia in 1474) he tried to instil a legal training: but Ludovico found greater pleasure in reading the Classics, and after a while was permitted to follow his bent. He studied Latin and Greek under the eminent humanist Gregory of Spoleto and, had his means allowed, would have become a cultured dilettante. But his father dying in 1500, Ludovico became head of the large family and had to provide for it. He therefore entered the service of Cardinal Hippolytus, whose brother Alfonso was shortly to become the reigning duke. Ludovico was already a competent poet in Latin and Italian, but Hippolytus, who was allotted his red hat at the age of fourteen, and not as a reward for piety, took a utilitarian attitude towards his retainers. Court poets had their virtues, no doubt, but they must earn their keep by more solid services than rhyming. Ludovico, tactful by discipline if not by nature, found himself regularly employed as Hippolytus' ambassador to the Holy See, either seeking a favour for his master, or averting the papal thunders from his head—and Julius II was no lamb. On one occasion the unfortunate envoy was refused audience and threatened with being dropped into the Tiber. For a man of independent spirit and a clear eye for human follies, the tasks imposed on him were bound to grate—especially as his one ambition was to write and write: already from about 1506 he was obsessed by his nascent *Orlando Furioso*. The break came after fourteen years, in 1517, when Hippolytus was to exercise a priestly duty in Hungary and Ludovico, summoned to accompany him, refused. Travel had its charms, Ariosto conceded, but a visit to Hungary was not on his programme. Better penury at home than wealth and station in alien lands.

Alfonso d'Este, the duke, was not averse, however, to taking a good court poet into his service—especially one with a growing reputation (the first edition of *Orlando Furioso* was already published, and he was solidly established as a comic playwright). The following year, 1518, therefore found the poet in the ducal household in Ferrara. Both brothers had a regrettably hard-headed notion of a court poet's duties; occasionally the singing had to stop and serious work to be undertaken. Ludovico found himself dispatched to the Garfagnana in 1522 as

Governor of that turbulent Este domain: turbulent because its rustic mountain-folk included a good proportion of bandits, and especially because the region was disputed by Ferrara, Lucca, and Florence, each of which maintained factions there ready to second a *coup* the moment there was any threat of redrawing the borders. Ludovico, a mild man by temper, was quite prepared to be steely on his lord's behalf, only to find, as he justly complained, that if he condemned, the villains had only to go behind his back to the duke to obtain an immediate reprieve. (Machiavelli was to advise his Prince, in the homonymous work already written but not yet published, to keep in his own hands the award of favours while leaving his lieutenants to incur the odium of harsh measures.) If Alfonso constantly undermined the work of his faithful governor, on whom he enjoined the utmost tact in dealing with his rustic subjects, he was clearly satisfied with his stewardship, for it was over three years before Ludovico could obtain his recall to Ferrara.

In 1525, however, he was back, and once more able to bask in the company of countless men (and women) of wit and learning who frequented the Este court. The additional attraction at Ferrara was Alessandra Benucci, his lady-love of twelve years' standing; now a widow, she had been wife of Tito Strozzi, a Florentine merchant residing at Ferrara. The relations between the poet and his mistress appear to have been serene and idyllic throughout (veiled allusions in the *Furioso* notwithstanding); if he did not cohabit with her it was to avoid losing the financial advantage accruing to him from an ecclesiastical benefice. Only at the end of his life did he make her his wife in a secret ceremony. His two children were by other women. In 1527 he had saved enough to build himself a modest house in Ferrara (still extant) with a little garden. Here he was permitted to devote the greater part of his time to his writing, notably to polishing and repolishing his great epic. But his health was failing when he accompanied his lord to the thermal spa at Abano: he had to leave the ducal retinue to be tended for fever by a friend at Padua in 1531. Recovered enough to resume his duties, he was entrusted with a mission to the military commander of Emperor Charles V, on whose power the Estes were now relying for their defence against papal incursions. Thus did Ariosto meet Alfonso d'Avalos, Marquis of Vasto, who proved to be not only a military leader of some talent but also a great admirer of the poet, on whom he conferred an annual pension of a hundred ducats and a selection of jewellery. Furthermore, the marquis commended him warmly to the emperor and effected their introduction at Mantua in November 1532. Great rewards and honours might now have accrued to the poet, but his last illness was already upon him.

If the spiritual scepticism he shared with his age prevented him from anticipating his future life with any strong convictions, he could take comfort in the past: the *Orlando Furioso*, on which he had laboured for wellnigh half his days, was now published in its third and definitive edition; he had an accessory reputation as an accomplished versifier in Italian and Latin lyrics; he had written four comedies which were frequently performed before titled audiences (stage sets for one Roman performance of *I Suppositi* were painted by Raphael, no less); he had written seven satires in *terza rima*, and left a fair volume of correspondence. Looking back now over his opus with a dispassionate eye, it must be confessed that his comedies—copybook exercises after Terence and Plautus—afford little pleasure; his occasional verses are skilful but forgettable. His satires, however, would have been the envy of Horace and Alexander Pope: in form utterly pleasing; in content, a most engaging self-portrait of a mild yet testy court retainer constantly having to kick against the goad, and gently self-derisive at his inability to live life the way he would wish. The seven satires: portrait of the poet as a middle-aged dog.

Mourned by a large circle of friends, Ariosto died in his house at Ferrara in July 1533. His tomb is, by courtesy of a Napoleonic general, in the great civic library of Ferrara.

The world into which Ariosto was born was not one in which the mediocre could make his way. The spirit of the Renaissance, the thirst to make new discoveries and apply the spiritual zeal of the Middle Ages to the challenges of a world of time and space, produced men of abundant vitality, men of keen mind and broad vision. The princely courts of Italy, insignificant in terms of political power, possessed for a while the lion's share of cultural wealth. The great artists and humanists of Ariosto's era are too numerous to list. In the race for the prize of artistic perfection there were many contenders, for the possibilities were now seen to exist of achieving in material form the most glorious visions of the imagination. Artists, writers, philosophers, and scientists looked about them and were not shy to build each on the others' foundations if only to raise the structure of human creativity higher towards the empyrean.

In this world of the Italian Renaissance the Este court enjoyed a position of eminence. The Estes ruled over a large tract of land in the Po valley between the Apennines and the Adriatic, including the cities of Reggio, Modena, and Ferrara. The family had risen to power in the thirteenth century and they were still at their apogee, unlike many other equally venerable dynasties in the peninsula. They were constantly squeezed, though, between the rival claims of the Venetian

Republic and the Papacy, who had lands adjoining to the north and south respectively. Each Italian state of this period, in order to preserve its independence, kept making alliances and new alliances as the political winds dictated, the smaller states shifting with every lurch of their larger neighbours. Five principal powers now dominated the peninsula: Sforza Milan, the Republic of Venice, Medicean Florence, the Papal States of Central Italy, and the Aragonese Kingdom of Naples. Allured by the treasures of Italy and incited by tenuous dynastic claims, three European princes turned covetous eyes across the Alps and awaited their chance—Charles VIII of France, Maximilian of Austria, and Ferdinand of Spain. When Ariosto was twenty, Charles VIII of France, invoked by the Sforza Duke, Ludovico il Moro, against the Neapolitans, crossed the Alps and, making a clean sweep of the peninsula, entered Naples unopposed. The next year (1495) a league including Venice, the slighted Sforzas (whose game Charles had refused to play), the Spaniards, and the Austrians ushered Charles back across the Alps.

However, his successor, Louis XII, found the prospect equally pleasing and made his entrance in 1499. He took Milan from the Sforzas (giving Cremona to helpful Venice), then reached an accommodation with his chief rival, Spain, whereby Lombardy went French, Naples Spanish. Each Italian state, meanwhile, tried to harness the alien horses to its own chariot. It took the choleric Pope Julius II to consolidate an opposition to the French, forming the Holy League with Maximilian, Ferdinand, and the Venetians; the French (with the help of Este artillery) defeated the League at Ravenna, 1512, but were ushered out nonetheless. The Venetians had, not four years previously, been the Public Enemy against whom Julius had leagued these same powers plus France in the League of Cambrai; to this league the Estes, fearful of Venetian encroachments, had willingly subscribed. But now, when Julius had bidden them join the new anti-French league with Venice for ally, the Estes had nervously declined, thus drawing down papal curses.

In 1515 Francis I was on the French throne and it was his turn for an Italian adventure. The fortunes of war ebbed and flowed across the peninsula—there were few winners and many losers—until young Charles of Hapsburg acceded to many thrones: those of his grandfather Maximilian's Austro-German Empire (with the Low Countries) and of his grandfather Ferdinand's Spain (with the Two Sicilies). Surrounded by the kingdoms of Charles V which stretched from the Rhine to the toe of Italy, Francis I sought in vain for allies in Italy; only after his defeat and capture by Charles at Pavia (1525), when he secured his release only by dint of diplomacy, did he succeed in fo-

menting a coalition including Pope Clement VII against the Emperor. Pavia, however, had spelt the end (for a few centuries) of the French presence in Italy: two years later the Imperial troops sacked Rome without hindrance. And the Estes? Their concern was purely to defend the integrity of their territory now against the Venetians, now against the Popes: whoever helped them, whether he spoke German, French, or Spanish, was their friend. And where arms failed, diplomacy or matrimonial alliances often served. Since the Estes were to govern Ferrara until the threshold of the seventeenth century, their politics must have been as well conceived as their artistic sponsorships.

II. Orlando Furioso and its Origins

In 778, as the Emperor Charlemagne withdrew across the Pyrenees after an expedition into Spain against the Saracens, his rearguard, led by his nephew Roland, was ambushed and cut to pieces at the Pass of Roncesvalles, as a result of traitor Ganelon's machinations. Legends of Charlemagne and his twelve paladins or peers were soon current, though three centuries and more elapsed before they were first synthesized in writing in the French poem *La Chanson de Roland*, the core of which is the tragedy of Roncesvalles where the flower of French chivalry perished. The notion was already prevalent—a product to some extent of the Crusades—that Charlemagne's warriors were noble of spirit, courteous, self-effacing, generous, merciful, courageous, gallant towards women, devout followers of Christ: they embodied the ideals of Christian knighthood. Turold's epic proved to be the first of a succession of tales spun round Charlemagne and Roland. The cast of characters was gradually augmented; the legends surrounding the Duke Aymon's four sons (of which Renaud was the most famous) and their steed Bayard were gradually interwoven with those of the emperor; as time went by, the heroes of King Arthur's Round Table became involved with their Carolingian counterparts and the chivalric cycle kept widening like a ripple on a pool. A hundred years after *La Chanson de Roland*, *Renaus* gave details of Renaud's ructions with Charlemagne, while *Aspremont* explained how the emperor withstood the African King Agolant's invasion of his Calabrian domains and how young Roland (Orlando) wrought wonders and captured the sword Durendal (the Italian Durindana). The twelfth-century French poet Chrétien de Troyes highlighted the romantic atmosphere in which Tristan loved Iseult, Lancelot loved Guinevere.

Originating in France, the legends soon conquered Italy, throwing up a host of storytellers ready to secure the loose threads to their spindles and continue spinning. A bastard language deemed suitable to the material, Franco-Lombard, was devised in which to relate

L'Entrée en Espagne and *La Prise de Pampelune*, works of the fourteenth century. Europe was now familiar with Roland's (or Orlando's) exploits in the Levant, the wiles of Ganelon (or Gano) in setting Charlemagne and his paladins at odds. Charlemagne dwindles, incidentally, to a figure of fun, a weak, injudicious, quick-tempered monarch always convinced of his rectitude. In the early fifteenth century *I Reali di Francia* (The Kings of France), while embroidering on the familiar characters, Christian and Pagan, gave a new prominence to Roger (Ruggiero) and the evils wrought on his parents during the African invasion of Calabria by Agolant and his sons.

By the time Luigi Pulci set quill to paper every foible of every Christian knight, every Saracen warrior was well known: each had his sword, his steed, his measure of valour, his appetite for spoils and broils; the chivalric world was replete with magic and spells, hermits and necromancers; the redoubtable Archbishop Turpin of Rheims had his place of honour as chronicler (to whom, as to the ultimate authority on the implausible, Ariosto was frequently to turn with hilarious effect). What Pulci contributed with his *Morgante Maggiore* (1482) was a sardonic, educated Tuscan wit. He was a friend of Lorenzo de' Medici and, while fully capable of sustaining a cultivated role at court, chose to write in a plebeian style, injecting a rich vein of farce into his narrative. But behind the buffoonery lay a metaphysical depth, a perception of the meaning of chivalry, which the earlier narratives lacked.

The Estes had a passion for the chivalric romances and the lost world they portrayed—the panoply of which they tried to recapture by staging jousts on gala occasions. Taking the torch from Pulci, the Este vassal Matteo Maria Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, set to work on his own synthesis. He completed two parts of his *Orlando Innamorato* but died with Part III only started, in 1494, lamenting the French invasion of Italy. Boiardo, slighted by posterity for having written in an unacceptably provincial Italian, is a poet of enormous charm and humour with a flair for words and an inventive mind. Writing in octaves like his predecessor Pulci, he spun several tales simultaneously. Charlemagne holds a tournament at Paris to which thousands of Christian and Saracen champions come. Among the contenders are Gradasso, King of Sericana, with an army to capture Orlando's sword Durindana and Rinaldo's steed Bayard. Among the contenders, too, is Argalia, equipped with magic weapons and four giants, and accompanied by his sister Angelica, Princess of Cathay. The pair have been sent by their father Galafron, Emperor of Cathay, to disrupt Charlemagne's court and lure his champions away, she promising herself to the man who defeats her brother. Like bees to the honey pot the

knights flock to Angelica, who hastens back to the Orient with her retinue of suitors, Christian and Pagan. Only Rinaldo resists, having drunk from a well which made him loathe her. In Cathay, Angelica is besieged at Albracca by her slighted suitor, King Agrican of Tartary, while her other suitors perform mighty feats to defend her. Orlando kills Agrican. Rinaldo, drinking from another well, falls in love with Angelica who is turned frosty by a drink at the well of hate where first he had drunk. Angelica permits Orlando to escort her back to the West, where Rinaldo and Orlando, cousins but rivals for Angelica's hand, fall out and thus permit the Saracens to defeat Charlemagne at Bordeaux. Meanwhile Ruggiero and Bradamant are in love and destined to found the Este line. These and many other ingredients, served in the gently elegiac mould of Boiardo's verse, awaited the attention of Ludovico Ariosto.

Orlando Innamorato was published in 1495, the year after the poet's death. In about 1506 Ariosto, zealous to complete what Boiardo had initiated, set to work on his poem. *Orlando Furioso* was first published in forty cantos at Ferrara in 1516, dedicated to Cardinal Hippolytus (who playfully taxed the poet with frivolity). A second, revised edition, also in forty cantos, was published in 1521 and was several times reprinted. Another eleven years of assiduous work were to go into the poem before the final definitive third edition in forty-six cantos was published in Ferrara in 1532, in the autumn before Ariosto's death. He had taken Boiardo's engaging minuet and turned it into a splendid symphony. The same characters were all there with scarcely a single new one introduced. The framework was the same: the war between Christendom and the Saracens; Angelica and her lovers; Ruggiero and Bradamant. But the half-formed characters of tradition were all of a sudden endowed with sharp identity; they could excite passion in the reader; psychological depths were suddenly disclosed, vistas of violence, wrath and glory were opened by the poet—who would then reach out, chuck his listeners under the chin, and say of his characters: 'Don't fret—they're only made of cardboard!'

Three qualities mark the *Furioso* from all its predecessors. First, the skill of the poet as narrator, who can sustain his listeners' interest through a work of Homeric proportions, and never (with one general exception) permit them a moment's boredom. Secondly, the skill of the poet as versifier: all those years of polishing have produced an artefact of supreme beauty, stanza after stanza of musical verse which is a joy to the ear as to the imagination, which faithfully mirrors every passion the poet wishes to convey; Ariosto's genius expresses itself in his octaves as Leonardo's expresses itself on canvas, a perfect harmony of mind and hand. The third quality which marks the *Furioso* from its

predecessors is the informing spirit of the poet: he holds together the diverse strands of his narrative with all the confidence of a genius, and enlivens the whole with his own sharp, tender, ironic, vital personality. If any flaws are to be discovered in the work (beyond the occasional lapse in psychology and neglect of dramatic possibilities), they are already adumbrated in the difficulties he met in matching his temperament to his courtier's role. To praise the Estes was no chore, for he could be justly proud of the dynasty and unfaltering in his loyalty to it. But the task of Laureate did not suit his creative vein and it is clear that a part of him goes to sleep whenever he fulfils his duty of homage—the passages in praise of his patrons may be skipped without regret. By extension, the hero and heroine, Ruggiero and Bradamant, are built up to prominence on the strength of their destiny as founders of the Este house, whereas their own personalities are relatively uninteresting. Ariosto seems to confess as much when, in the last canto, having rounded off his portrait of Ruggiero as a paragon of the knightly ideal, he says (with what I take to be a stifled yawn) that at jousting, wrestling, dancing, all the festive games at his wedding, he bore off the prize. Certainly in the course of the poem these two paragons, Ruggiero and Bradamant, come in for some sly digs from the poet, as though he were privately thumbing his nose at his much-applauded patrons while their attention is momentarily distracted.

The virtues of the poem, whose rich medley of plots and characters it would be superfluous to sketch here, are neatly underlined by one of Europe's most lucid thinkers who was also among Ariosto's greatest admirers; Voltaire, under the heading *Epopée* in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, comments on the *Furioso*: 'What has especially delighted me in this prodigious work is that its author, always in command of his material, treats it with gay badinage. He effortlessly gives voice to the sublimest things only to finish them with a twist of pleasantry which is neither out of place nor recherché. It is the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and *Don Quixote* all rolled into one—for his principal knight errant goes mad like the Spanish hero, and is infinitely more attractive. Furthermore Orlando captures one's interest while no one is interested in Don Quixote, whom Cervantes represents simply as a fool on whom japes are constantly practised.'

III. Orlando Furioso in English

Twelve versions of the poem had appeared in France before the first English translation saw the light in 1591—the version in 'English heroical verse' by Sir John Harington. The delay did not trouble cultured Englishmen who included a knowledge of Italian among their

accomplishments. Edmund Spenser wrote his *Faerie Queene* at this time with the avowed intention of surpassing Ariosto, which suggests he must have been acquainted with one of the French versions, if not with the original. Posterity may well blame Spenser for espousing the octave—had he chosen a more English structure, he might today be more widely read. As for Harington, he incurred sharp censure from a later translator, William Stuart Rose (whose labours spanned eight years to 1831). Rose dismisses Harington's version as inaccurate, mercilessly condensed, pedestrian where the original was poetic, dreary where the original was witty. Rose is not much more indulgent to those who came between: J. Hoole, the Huggins/Croker partnership, H. Bent (*Ludovico Ariosto his Mad Orlando, Englished in Octaves*), all eighteenth-century translators. Rose himself, a man of wealth, leisure and culture, enjoyed the friendship of the exiled Ugo Foscolo, an Italian poet and critic of Byronic stature (and temper), and could therefore rely on the most authoritative help in construing the Italian. He was urged to his task by Sir Walter Scott—who knew a thing or two about writing romances. Scott was a zealous admirer of Ariosto's epic, and learned Italian in order to read it in the original. He notes in his *Journal* that he succeeded in scandalizing his Professor of Greek at Edinburgh by writing an essay in which he compared Homer unfavourably with Ariosto. The good professor would doubtless have been even more upset to hear Voltaire and, later, Byron make the same comparison and draw the same conclusion!

I follow in William Stuart Rose's steps, and, in the task of appraising his work, am glad to shelter behind a remark of Sir Walter's—who was, after all, his good friend: 'Sam made us merry with an account of some part of Rose's Ariosto; proposed that the Italian should be printed on the other side for the sake of assisting the indolent reader to understand English; and complained of his using more than once the phrase of a lady having "voided her saddle".' (*Journal*, October 19th, 1826.) True, alas—except that Rose favours the noun 'sell' as often as 'saddle'. His verse is, as its predecessors', in octaves; his language is wilfully archaic, as though conceived in gothic script. Where Harington presented the English reader with a pedestrian Orlando, Rose's, if more accurate, was merely whimsical.

Now what these translators had in common was their aspiration to be poets: Ariosto wrote in octaves, so they too would write in octaves. But the *ottava rima* in the hands of a craftsman of Ariosto's technical brilliance, an *ottava rima* which now floats, spins, ripples, now sparks and crackles, now hisses like blown spume, is not the 'Englished octave' presented to the British reader. For Ariosto art is all, and Ariosto is a genius. Moreover, the octave suits the fluidity of Italian

with its sharp vowel sounds; it does not suit so well the more consonantal structure of English words. To say that Rose's octaves, and Bent's and Harington's, do no justice to Ariosto's art is to express my meaning mildly. Their octaves do not convey the magic, the excitement of his sounds and rhythms. And they do not convey the shades of his meaning: Ariosto was a poet of the most delicate nuances—in a few simple strokes he could convey an observation, an inflection of feeling: omit but one of those strokes and the delicate fabric disintegrates. How could any translator show fidelity to the original when he had to lay his version on the Procrustean bed of the 'Englished octave' and accept the tyrannous demands of its rhyme and metre, lopping off here, padding out there? The English version was necessarily a paraphrase—and to compare the two finished artefacts, the Italian and the English, is enough to make one weep.

Herein lies my apology for translating the epic into prose. It takes an Ariosto to match an Ariosto on his chosen ground. But his verve as a poet was largely matched by his skill as a *narrator*, and this, the narrative, I have striven to capture faithfully and whole. I could still attempt to salvage all I was able of the music and rhythm of the original, for prose is capable of an immense range. But above all I could try with a hard, sharp pencil to trace the original text in its every subtlest twist and angle. I could try to render the meaning in its lightest shadings, and sacrifice a shade of meaning only exceptionally when the demands of the ear had to take precedence over those of the intellect; Ariosto wrote to be heard rather than to be read, and the sound of words, needless to say, matters. (This will explain, if not excuse, the occasional inconsistencies in proper names where my ear expressed a bland subjective preference; for example, Alfonso, Ercole, but Hippolytus.) Ariosto permitted himself a vocabulary occasionally stilted by the standards of normal social conversation, and I too, while aiming on the whole for acceptable current English usage, have allowed myself certain words which survive only in *belles lettres*: 'damsel', for example in preference to 'girl'—there are various instances where the old-fashioned word seems better suited to my purpose than are those which have replaced it. As a rule, however, I have tried to avoid both the archaic and the modern idiom which is liable to date.

This prose translation, the outcome of five years' loving and concentrated effort, can only be regarded as a success if it achieves its goal: to awake the public to the attractions, to the pleasures of Ariosto's poem, a sublime work whose neglect in the English-speaking world can only be explained by the absence of a translation which conveys to us the living author. Several generations of Englishmen have been introduced to Homer not by Pope, not by Chapman, but by the late

E. V. Rieu, author of the immensely popular prose translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. May the *Orlando Furioso*, a work on the same scale of grandeur, reach a wide audience at last in these pages.

I am glad to acknowledge my gratitude to many friends who encouraged me over the years; to Carol Buckroyd, as diligent and tactful an editor as one could wish for; and above all to my beloved Lalage, typist of three hundred thousand words and staunch supporter of my conviction that the *Orlando Furioso* was fun to read and deserved resurrecting.

GUIDO WALDMAN

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Annotated Index at the end of the volume, and the summaries at the start of each canto relate to the stanza-numbers of the Italian original. The stanzas may be located individually by reference to the figures at the top of each page; an oblique stroke in the printed text marks the interval between each stanza.

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