LUDOVICO ARIOSTO (1474-1533), ITALIAN POET. Born in Lombardy, author of satires and dramatic comedies, Ariosto is most famous for his influential romance, the epic chivalric poem *Orlando Furioso* (1532).

JOHN HARINGTON (1580-1612), COURTIER, WRITER, AND TRANSLATOR. Reportedly, Harington’s translation of *Orlando Furioso* was a ‘command’ performance, ordered by Elizabeth I when she discovered he had already distributed his version of the work’s more erotic sections among her ladies-in-waiting. Its first, sumptuous edition (1591) was followed by two more (1607, revised; 1634). Sometimes remembered as the popularizer of the first English ‘water-closet’ (through his *Metamorphosis of Ajax* [1596]), Harington was also an accomplished poet: his satirical epigrams were frequently copied and circulated throughout the seventeenth century.

EDITIONS:

ORLANDO FURIOSO (1591)

From BOOK 25

[Ricciardetto tells a story about his sister, the knight Bradamante. They are twins, so similar in appearance that they are often mistaken for each other.]

19
‘It happened (as in part I touched before)
My valiant sister passing through a wood
Was hurt with certain Saracens so sore¹
As had her cost almost her vital blood,
Which wound to cure her tresses short she wore,
For so as then her surgeon thought it good.
The wound once cured for which her head was polled,
Abroad to go again she waxed bold.

20
‘And having travelled till the heat of day
All clad in armour as her manner was,

¹ *Saracens*  Muslim warriors.
At noon she took occasion to make stay
Fast by a wat’ry stream as clear as glass,
And putting off her helmet, down she lay
Upon a pleasant bank well-clothed with grass,
And sleep at last her heavy eyes did close,
The place inviting her to take repose.

21
‘Now while she did there fast asleep remain
There happened to arrive unto that place
The daughter of Marsilio, king of Spain,2
That there by chance was hunting in the chase,
And seeing signs of manhood very plain
With that her sweet and amiable face,
As horse and sword and target all of steel,3
A little amorous passion she doth feel.

22
‘And taking then my sister for a man,
As by all circumstances well she might,
She offers her all court’sy that she can
And asked her if in hunting she delight;
And then to choose a standing they began,4
And finding one far off from others’ sight,
She opened more plainly that affection
That had her heart already in subjection,

23
‘And save her maiden modesty forbad,
She would the same in words have plainly told.
Howb’it with sighs, with rueful looks and sad,5
And silent signs, she doth her grief unfold;
And when she thus long time discoursèd had,
Surprised with hope, she could no longer hold,
But steps to her and gives her such a kiss
As that alone shows what her meaning is.

24
‘My sister at the first doth think it strange

2 daughter of Marsilio  Fiordispina (identified by name in stanza 32).
3 target shield.
4 standing a concealed place from which to shoot game.
5 howb’it howbeit.
That such a suit should unto her be made,
And finding she had ta’en her in exchange,
She thinks it best (before she further wade
Or let the t’other’s humour further range)\(^6\)
Tell troth, for thus she doth herself persuade,
’Tis better to be known a lady gentle
Then to be deemed a base man and ungentle,\(^7\)

25
‘For what could be more cullen-like or base\(^8\)
Or fitter for a man were made of straw,\(^9\)
Than standing in a fair young lady’s grace
To show himself a cuckow or a daw\(^10\)
And lose occasion both of time and place?
My sister therefore that this ill foresaw
And knew she wanted that that her should aid\(^11\)
Told her by circumstance she was a maid;

26
‘And thus she told her how the worthy fame
Hippolyta and stout Camilla won\(^12\)
In deeds of arms moved her her mind to frame
To do the like while others sewed and spun,
And that she thought it to her sex no shame
To do as women of such worth had done.
She told her this in hope this would appease her,
But this alas did so much more disease her.

27
‘For why, the fancy was so firmly fixed\(^13\)
That in her mind she had before conceived
By means of speech had passèd them betwixt That sore it griev’d her to be thus deceived.\(^14\)
Before, her fear with some good hope was mixed,

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\(^6\) humour \(\text{inclination.}\)
\(^7\) ungentle \(\text{discourteous.}\)
\(^8\) cullen-like \(\text{despicable.}\)
\(^9\) for ... straw \(\text{i.e., if a man were only the counterfeit image of one (unmanly).}\)
\(^10\) cuckow \(\text{cuckoo. daw \text{ jackdaw. Both mean ‘fool.’}}\)
\(^11\) wanted \(\text{lacked.}\)
\(^12\) Hippolyta \(\text{a queen of the Amazons, a mythic race of fierce female warriors.}\)
\(^13\) For why \(\text{because.}\)
\(^14\) sore \(\text{deeply.}\)
But now ev’n hope itself was her bereaved,
And this is one extremest point of grief,
Still to despair and hope for no relief.

28
‘He that had heard her woeful plaint and moan
Must needs have greatly at the same been grieved:
“Ah woe is me,” she said, “that I alone
Should live in such despair to be relieved.
In passé times I think there hath been none,
In time to come it will not be believed,
That love should make by such a strong infection
One woman bear another such affection.

29
“O Cupid, if thou didst my state envy
And that thou had’st a mind me to torment,
To send such pains as others more do try
At least methink thou should’st have been content.
Shall in so many ages none but I
Yield of so uncouth love such precedent?15
The female with the female doth not wish
To couple, nor in beast, nor fowl, nor fish.

30
“I sole am found in earth, air, sea, or fire,
In whom so strange a wonder thou hast done.
On me thou show’st the power of thine ire
And what a mighty conquest thou hast won.
The wife of Ninus had a strange desire
To join in copulation with her son;16
Fair Myrrha by her sire was made a mother
And made Adonis both her son and brother;17

31
“Pasiphae, except it be a tale,
Was bulled enclosed in a wooden cow;18
Yet in all these the female sought the male,

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15 *uncouth* unheard of; also ‘strange, distasteful.’
16 *wife of Ninus ... son* See ‘Semiramis,’ Glossary (print anthology).
17 *Myrrha* daughter of Cinyras, king of Cyprus. She secretly seduced her father, and when he realized what had happened he tried to kill her. She gave birth to Adonis, and was then changed into the myrrh tree.
18 *bulled* mounted sexually by a bull. See Pasiphae (Glossary, print anthology).
But Nature doth my fancy disallow;
No, Daedalus could not remedy my bale, 19
Nor art can frame nor sense imagine how:
This knot Dame Nature hath so firmly knit
It cannot be dissolved by any wit.”

32
‘Thus Fiordispina fair (so was her name)
In piteous sort her woeful state doth wail.
My sister unto her her speech doth frame
As chiefly to her comfort might avail,
And wished her this unbridled will to tame,
Sith Nature could not suffer it prevail, 20
And that she would let that desire be daunted 21
Which possibly by no means could be granted.

33
‘All this but all in vain my sister said
To seek that fancy from her mind to wrest.
She that for comfort cared not, but for aid,
Doth more and more herself vex and molest.
Now night grew on as they together stayed
What time all creatures seek repose and rest.
The lady prays my sister for her sake
A lodging at her castle then to take.

34
‘To this request doth Bradamant assent,
And so together to that place they came
Where I (but that you did my harm prevent)
Should have been cast into the burning flame. 22
She that all kindness to my sister meant
By many outward court’sies showed the same
And caused her to wear a woman’s weed 23
That men might know that she was one indeed.

19 Daedalus here, the emblem of the ingenious inventor, one whose creations circumvent natural limitations. See ‘Daedalus,’ Glossary (print anthology).  
20 sith since.
21 daunted vanquished.
22 Where ... flame Ricciardetto’s interlocutor is Rogero, who has just saved the young knight from being burnt alive at the castle of Marsilio (Fiordispina’s father); Marsilio is enraged when he discovers Ricciardetto’s deception of his daughter.
23 weed apparel.
35
‘For why the semblance false she saw before  
Of manly shape to her was so pernicious,  
She would now see her in those weeds no more,  
The rather eke lest folk should be suspicious  
(If she had been as showed the weed she wore)  
Lest that they two did live together vicious;  
She further was by physic rules assured  
That contraries by contraries are cured.

36
‘But nought could salve that sore nor ’suage her woes.  
That night they lay together in one bed,  
But sundry and unlike was their repose.  
One quiet slept, the t’other’s troubled head  
Still waking, or if she her eyes but close,  
That little sleep strange dreams and fancies bred:  
She thought the gods and heav’n would so assist her  
Into a better sex to change my sister.

37
‘As men tormented with a burning fever  
Do dream with drink they ’suage their grievous thirst,  
But, when they wake, they feel their thirst persever  
And to be greater than it was at first,  
So she whose thoughts from love sleep could not sever  
Did dream of that for which she wake did thirst,  
But waking felt and found it as before,  
Her hope still less and her desire still more.

38
‘How fervently did she to Macon pray?  
What vows did she unto her prayer annex  
If so by mighty miracle he may

24 For why Because.
25 eke also.
26 vicious wickedly.
27 She ... cured It was a commonplace of ancient and early modern medicine (physic) that a disease (for example) could be cured by using medicines characterized by qualities in opposition to those of the disease itself (so that a disease characterized by ‘heat’ could be cured through applying medicines composed of plants and herbs defined as ‘cold’).
28 ’suage assuage.
29 Macon the Prophet Mohammed (Marsilio is Saracen [Muslim] king of Spain).
Her bedfellow turn to a better sex?
Now near approached the dawning of the day
When she in vain herself doth grieve and vex,
And so much more her passion grew the stronger
Because my sister now would stay no longer.

[After hearing from Bradamante the tale of Fiordispina’s passion, Ricciardetto decides to impersonate his sister to gain access to Fiordispina. When they are alone together, Ricciardetto tells Fiordispina the following story to account for his present masculine sex.]

43
‘Love was my councillor that me advised;
My meaning secret I to none impart.
This was the stratagem that we devised,\(^{30}\)
This was the plot, the cunning, and the art:
To go in Bradamante’s clothes disguised,
And for a while to play the woman’s part.
I knew my face my sister’s so resembling
Would be the better help for my dissembling.

44
‘The day ensuing ere it yet was light
I took my way, my love and fancy guiding.
I there arrived an hour before ’twas night,
Such hap I had, such haste I made in riding.\(^{31}\)
No sooner came I in the servant’s sight,
But well was he of me could carry tiding;
They look (as princes oft to give do use)
Some recompense for bringing so good news.

45
‘Straight out she came and met me half the way,
And took me fast about the neck and kissed me,
And told me how in this my little stay\(^{32}\)
In anguish great and sorrow she had missed me;
Then she did cause me alter mine array,\(^{33}\)
In which with her own hands she doth assist me.

\(^{30}\)we i.e., Love and Ricciardetto.
\(^{31}\)hap luck, good fortune.
\(^{32}\)little stay brief absence.
\(^{33}\)array clothing.
A caul of gold she set upon my crown,\textsuperscript{34}
And put on me a rich and stately gown,

46
‘And for my part to help the matter, I
Did take great heed to all I did or said.
With sober cast I carried still mine eye,
And bore my hands before me like a maid.
My voice did serve me worst, but yet thereby
Such heed I used my sex was not bewrayed.\textsuperscript{35}
And thus arrayed, my princess led me with her
Where many knights and ladies were together.

47
‘My look and clothes did all them so beguil\textsuperscript{36}
They all had thought I had a woman been,
And honour such was done to me that while
As if I were a duchess or a queen;
And (that which made me oftentimes to smile)
Some youths there were of years and judgement green
That cast upon me many a wanton look,
My sex and quality they so mistook.

48
‘At last came meat, both store of flesh and fish,
What kinds of both to tell I overslip.\textsuperscript{37}
I maidenly taste here and there a dish,
And in the wine I scant do wet my lip.
The time seemed long that stayed my wanton wish,
And still I doubted taking in some trip.\textsuperscript{38}
When bedtime came, she told me I must be
Her bedfellow, the which well pleasèd me.

49
‘Now when the maids and pages were all gone,
One only lamp upon the cupboard burning,
And all coasts clear, thus I began anon:

\textsuperscript{34} caul netted cap or headdress, often richly decorated. \textit{crown} head.
\textsuperscript{35} bewrayed betrayed, revealed.
\textsuperscript{36} beguile deceive.
\textsuperscript{37} overslip i.e., let pass by without description or comment.
\textsuperscript{38} And still I doubted taking in some trip i.e., And I was constantly afraid of ‘slipping up’ and revealing my true gender.
“Fair dame, I think you muse of my returning, And cause you have indeed to muse thereon, For yesterday when I did leave you mourning, I think both you and I did think as then We should not meet again till God knows when.

50
“First let me tell you why from you I went, Then why I come hereafter I shall show. Dear lady (thus it was) I did lament Your fruitless love on me was placed so, And though I could have ay been well content To wait on you and never part you fro, Yet since my presence did but make you languish, I thought mine absence ’minish would your anguish;

51
“But riding on my way I somewhat strayed As fortune and adventure did me guide, And lo I heard a voice that cried for aid Within a thicket by the riverside. A satyr taken had a naked maid And with a twisted cord her hands had tied, And in his usage seemed so to threaten her As if he would have killed her straight and eaten her.42

52
“I rushed to them with naked sword in hand And death to him and freedom I did give her, She diving underwater out of hand.” ‘Unrecompensed thou shalt not me deliver,’ Quoth she, ‘for I will have you understand I am a nymph that dwell here in this river, And for this court’sy I do much regard you And am well able richly to reward you.

39 **muse of** wonder at, ponder upon.  
40 **ay** always.  
41 HARINGTON’S MARGINAL NOTE: This is a frivolous tale, devised by him to blear [deceive, blind] her eyes, and therefore it is not requisite it should be probable, though Castelvetro, an Italian writer, found fault with this because, he sayeth, it should have had more probability.  
42 **straight** immediately, at once.
‘Ask of me what you list, and I will give it,’
For I upon the elements have pow’r.
I can with charms bring down the moon, believe it;
I can ’suage storms and make fair weather low’r;
What is so hard but my skill can achieve it?
To drain the sea or build in air a tow’r?
Yea ev’n with simple words (and if I will)
I can enforce and make the sun stand still.’

“Whenas the nymph had made me this great offer
(Lo, lady, what great love to you I bare)
I neither asked with gold to fill my coffer
Nor victory of which some greedy are;
This favour only I demanded of her:
To make me able to assuage your care,
Nor named I any means for fear of erring,
The only way and means to her referring.

“No sooner this request to her I told
But in the crystal stream again she dived
And sprinkled me with drops of water cold
Which to my skin no sooner were arrived
But I was changed from that I was of old,
And of my former state I was deprived.
I felt, I saw, yet scant believe I can,
That of a woman I was made a man;

“And saving that ev’n now I am so nigh you
As you may quickly prove my tale not feigned,
Else you might think I said it but to try you.”
Now lo, since I for you this wish obtained,
Ask what you please, I nothing shall deny you,
Enjoy that which my love for you hath gained.”
‘When I had pleaded thus and she had hard it,”

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43 list desire.
44 bring ... moon Traditionally, witches have power over the planets.
45 low’r look threatening.
46 whenas when.
47 try test.
On sight of evidence she gave her vardit.  

57
‘As one whose state is overwhelmed with debt
By lending or by spending out of measure
That looks each hour when prowling shreeves will fet
Himself to ward and of his goods make seasure,
If some unlooked for gain he hap to get
By some man’s death or by some trovy treasure,
Is so surprisèd with joy he scant doth know
If true it be or if he dreamèd so,

58
‘So she that now did see and feel and touch
That which she long had longèd for in vain,
It overfilèd her mind with joy so much
It seemèd in a trance she did remain.
Therein her incredulity was such
As to resolve her I did take much pain.
“If these be dreams,” quoth she, “for these dreams’ sake
I ever wish to dream and never wake.”

59
‘Not sound of drum, of trumpet, or of fife,
Nor warlike instrument of any sort
Did sound alarum to our friendly strife,
But dovelike billing followed lovely sport.
This battle hazards neither limb nor life.
Without a ladder I did scale the fort
And stoutly plant my standard on the wall,
And under me I made my foe to fall.

60
‘If that same bed were full the night before
Of tears, of plaints, of anguish and annoys,
No doubt but now it had in as great store
Both smilings, sports, and solaces and joys.

48 hard heard.
49 vardit verdict.
50 shreeves sheriffs. fet fetch.
51 ward prison. seasure seizure.
52 hap chance.
53 trovy treasure treasure trove.
54 plaints complaints, lamentations. annoys vexations, troubles.
No ivy doth embrace the pillar more
Than she did me, nor apes can find more toys than we young fools did find to make us merry,
Till joy itself of joy did make us weary.

61
‘The thing twixt us did secret long remain,
And certain months this pleasure did endure
Till some had found and told it to my pain
As you well know that did my life assure;
Yet I confess great grief I still sustain
Not knowing how her safety to procure.’
This Ricciardetto to Rogero told,
And all the while their journey on they hold.

55 *apes can find more toys* ‘Toys’ seems to refer to ‘amorous play;’ female apes were well-known for clasping and hugging their newborns.
56 HARINGTON’S MARGINAL NOTE: The end of the tale of Fiordispina.