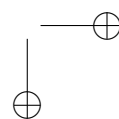
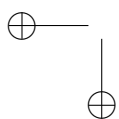
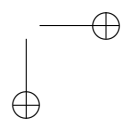
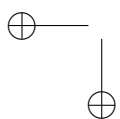
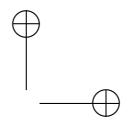
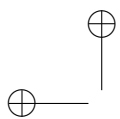
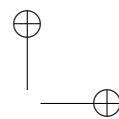
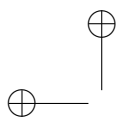


THE FURIOSO



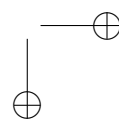
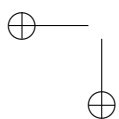


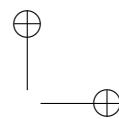
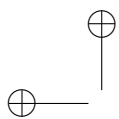


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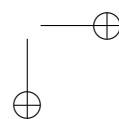
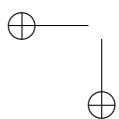
Leonard Bacon

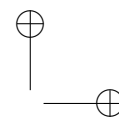
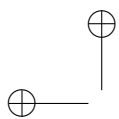
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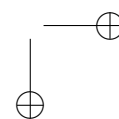
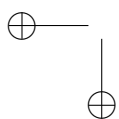
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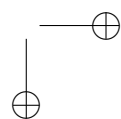
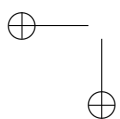
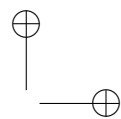
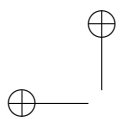


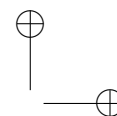
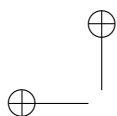


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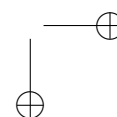
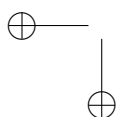


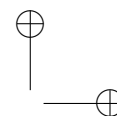
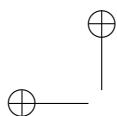
INTRODUCTION

Nine years ago a vision came to me
And set me all on fire. Always before
I saw a symbol of strange energy
Strangely astray. It held me more and more,
The very emblem of modernity,
That hectic fruit with queer worms at the core.
Men are not to be understood. I can
Neither reveal myself nor any man

Wholly. I therefore choose the enigmatic,
The figure that I never shall expound
To my satisfaction, having an emphatic
Sense that I wander on unchancy ground,
Where any statement is undiplomatic.
This does not trouble me like the profound
Feeling of the gulf that lies between the fact
And the theory which the petulant mind has hacked

Out of hearsay, intuition, random reading,
Legendary lies, old ladies' recollections,
Club gossip, patriotic special pleading,
And rumor, full of tongues, from all directions.
Don't for a moment think I'm interceding
For my book, though it stands high in my affections.
I merely am considering how far
Things are from what you and I think they are.





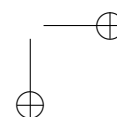
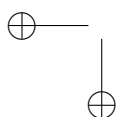
INTRODUCTION

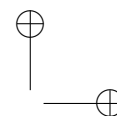
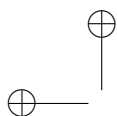
I had a deep emotion. I beheld
A man all vigor, violence, and fire,
By no convention to be curbed or quelled,
Shaping the Universe to his desire,
A modern Lucifer that had rebelled
Magnificently. The dream began to tire
From the moment of its birth. There came instead
A wayward man with crotchets in his head,

And too much given to taking himself seriously
And dramatizing vulgar egotism,
Always reacting nervously or deliriously,
And yet a prey to a cold paroxysm
Of rather commonplace thought, which deleteriously
Affected forty volumes of mannerism,
And by the ordinary ambitions bitten.
I had a vision. What is it I have written?

Five thousand lines on a Chimera, never
Getting within shouting-distance of the Sphinx
Of actuality, though my endeavor
Had some nerve in it. My own mental kinks
Defeated vision. And mystery as ever
Concealed from me the necessary links
In the chain of thought, and, naturally, mysteriously.
Who did I say was taking himself seriously?

Some one has written on this commonplace,
How in a dream 'twas granted him to see
His characters swim into time and space
As he created them. In an agony
He studied them, for this one lacked a face,
And this was bodiless futility,
And a third only a pair of vacuous eyes
Which their creator could not recognize.





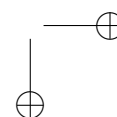
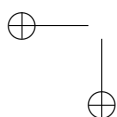
INTRODUCTION

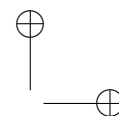
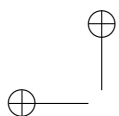
I could not draw the man who in the strait
Of Buccari, on the sub-chaser's prow,
Chanted his poems, or vented childish hate
Of Austria, or told Italo Balbo how
He was with him, "without adding to the weight,"
On the Brazilian flight (which I allow
Is handsome), or who, kindly underneath,
Auctioned for charity his wisdom-teeth.

I've stated my opinion. Let it pass.
Perhaps that judgement yet may write me down
For a superlative ephemeral ass,
Who lightly took it on himself to clown
With genius that endures longer than brass.
(That rhyme would come.) But subsequent renown
In fifty years may equal like as not
All claims and both of us will be forgot.

There is a fatal writing on the wall,
Which says that certain things must not endure.
Our vanity and our deceit must fall.
Our poetry's a fault that time will cure,
The whole damned shooting-match, all of it, all!
Though I dreamed that in our waste of literature
Some hidden song might rise that should be sung
A thousand years hence when the world grows young.

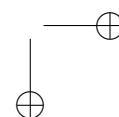
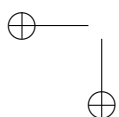
When the world grows young and beauty is in thought
And action, like new leaf in April woods,
When brown shards of our centuries overfraught
Lie underfoot in gleaming solitudes,
A song melodious that a muse has taught
May linger, timidest of interludes,
'Mid strange new music with wild power and tang.
That is the song my singer never sang.

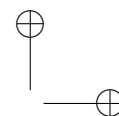
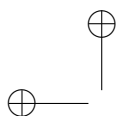




INTRODUCTION

Better men than he could never sing it. Still
We should be gentle to bizarre despair
Striking attitudes at Gardone, with the thrill
Gone from all attitudes however fair.
He found no Missolonghi. Thought and Will
Have perished. Every hope's fled elsewhere
With the memory of fatalities and crimes.
Yet the man was the Byron of our times.





CANTO I: IMAGO

... al fine avro *da te* forse il selvaggio
inno che il paziente orgoglio aspetta,
l'inno alla mia vigilia e al mio coraggio.

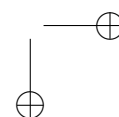
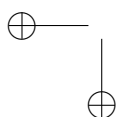
MEROPE, LA CANZONE DI MARIO BIANCO
G. d'Annunzio, 1911–12

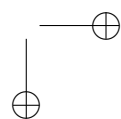
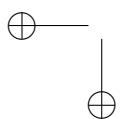
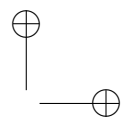
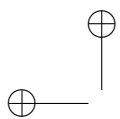
... l'ala d'el disio cadea ghiacciata.

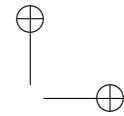
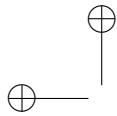
PRIMO VERE, NORAH
G. d'Annunzio, 1880

... perchè tanti risorgimenti?

AD ANGELO MAI
Giacomo Leopardi







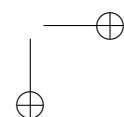
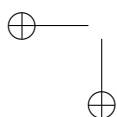
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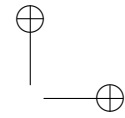
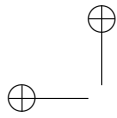
Whom to invoke? The modern epic bard
Is at a disadvantage, I confess.
Woe for lost goddesses! It's rather hard
To lack a muse appropriate to address.
Anyhow I must play my highest card,
Be it deuce or knave, or, as we may in chess,
Lead out my knight before I move a pawn.
Here he is in the soft Italian dawn,

High on that stately rock that seems to lean
Above Trascara – a lad with pear-shaped eyes
And a nose thick at the end, just turned sixteen,
Gazing where the blue Adriatic lies
Lipping the yellow beaches serpentine,
Her snake's back wrinkling as the dawn-wind flies
Soft oversea from the enchanted coast,
Dim isles, where once Alcinoüs ruled the roast.

The gazing boy stared on that glamorous sea,
As a hypnotic on the crystal ball,
Where pass the pageants of futurity,
(That is to say, if things pass there at all)
And might be gazing yet. Unhappily
A roll of paper happened then to fall
Out of his knapsack. He snatched up the bunch
And thrust it in his pouch, beside his lunch.

But broken the intolerable spell
Of all that beauty. Presently he drew
Out of his poke writing and bread, and fell
Upon the more substantial of the two.
He had a flagon of sour wine as well,
Which he drank, pausing now and then to view
Sea and far foreshore, and the play divine
Of shade and sun on purple Apennine





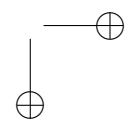
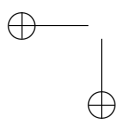
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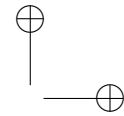
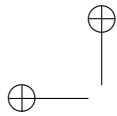
Warmed by the meagre wine and generous sun,
He turned the pages of his manuscript,
Part of his passport to oblivion.
But the soft terza rima, as it tripped
'Mid the rhymes, pleased him. Poets find it fun
To read their verses. Swiftly the moments slipped,
As he conned over many a plangent line
That was great stuff in 1879.

O the sweet animal pleasure of bright verse,
That gives the barren votary satisfaction
Sharp as all savor of the universe,
Great as a thought and real as an action!
I'll never think the lovely soul the worse
Because the body hath such sweet attraction
As the bride's, yielding in her virgin shame,
Naked and beautiful beyond all name.

Thus I feel sympathy for that lone boy,
In fancy lost on the Abruzzian height,
While the bees hummed in the wild heath for joy,
And his soul danced in the winepress of delight,
Trampling the wine out that can never cloy.
He did not think. He was portion of that white
And flawless day, the brilliant sea and air,
And loneliness and beauty everywhere,

At one with song "that dances and fights back
"And trembles, tamed, under a strong man's hand."
The muse embraced, or stretched him on the rack –
He felt creation in his soul expand,
Or every muscle of the mind go slack
After the gust that no man can withstand.
A verse throbbed out of him with a cadence brave:
"O skies of cobalt! O the enchanted wave!"





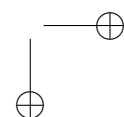
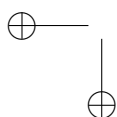
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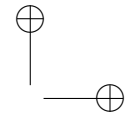
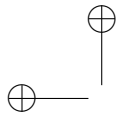
An hour went by. Still whispering or declaiming
He sate, now looking vaguely from the page,
As though he saw ideal beauty shaming
Appearance on our evanescent stage.
Now, with a bent brow and an eye dull-flaming,
He taught the doubtful trochees where to rage,
And, with a comic look of fierce decision,
Made verse pay her whole tribute to revision.

What fun it was! Smiling he wrote. And yet he
Seemed ill-content. Too well he could divine
The echo of the manner of Stecchetti,
Posing and posturing in every line.
Young poets feel that imitation's petty,
And yet it will creep into their design.
Over his forehead came a cloud of pain.
From the scrawled page, seaward he looked again,

Where all those visionary isles and capes
Of the Dalmatian shore had disappeared
Into mirage and vapor. So escapes
A dream. As his exploring mind had cleared,
Seeing his creations in their proper shapes,
The morning beauty fled. It's to be feared
Most poets whose dreams vanish so, don't see
So well the failings of their poetry –

Sadly he thought: "I press Stecchetti's grapes,
"Knowing that they will never yield the wine
"I would have splash my feet. The critic gapes
"Because I give him what is none of mine.
"O Poetry, why must you make us apes,
"Who would cut out our hearts before your shrine?
"Why must the torrent of my molten gold
"Run in a feuilletonist's ungracious mould?





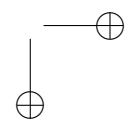
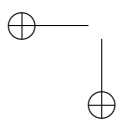
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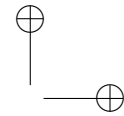
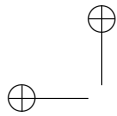
“And Stecchetti of all men! While Dante gleaming
“Yonder in Ravenna lightens from the tomb,
“Or Leopardi, with his dreadful dreaming,
“Shoots darkness visible against the gloom
“Of all this life’s intolerable seeming,
“Prostrate in the real dust, glimpsing what doom,
“What shadow, what soul-shocking fate, what curse,
“What horror overhangs the universe.

“Deceived by the ideal, how the one
“Is one with Beatrice in Paradise,
“Fast in the heart of God, sun within sun!
“And for the other, in what Hell he lies,
“Kissing the dead lips of Oblivion
“Vainly! And such darkness still before his eyes
“As, in the burst of agony and awe,
“In the hour that no man can endure, he saw.

“O Dante, Leopardi, lost, lost, lost,
“Each on your own frontier of the ideal!
“Love’s apotheosis or death’s holocaust –
“Either for me unmeaning and unreal!
“But how, for me, if those strange highways crossed,
“Or ran together in union hymeneal,
“Hope and despair joined in a consummation,
“Each of them but the pulse of that sensation

“That is the I I am, thrilling and throbbing
“This nerve and fibre of me everywhere,
“Worthy for its own sake, though, it may be, robbing
“Life of its hope and death of its despair,
“Song-maddened, or when nightingales are sobbing,
“Or the larks drift in music through wild air,
“Thrown in the face of sunrise in a throng
“Distraught by light and height and wind and song?





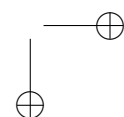
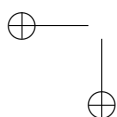
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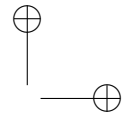
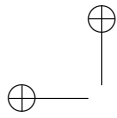
“Or sad or glad I choose that passion, seeing
“Only in that my end. For what can be
“Real, save only that? What else this being,
“This throb, this pulse, this tide of ecstasy,
“Pain, pleasure, interplaying and agreeing
“In a strange harmony that makes me me,
“Melodious voice and palpitating brain? –
“To write Stecchetti’s verses o’er again?”

Noon came, departing with a dying breath
Of wind. The haze drew nearer o’er the sea.
Mid afternoon – that still to each man saith,
“Beauty must end.” He rolled his poetry
Up in his pouch, and down across the heath,
O’ermurmured yet by the belated bee,
Plunged coastward. On the summits still the light
Struck from the Westward. But the shadow and night

Marched on him as he reached the town. The street
Glowed slimily, where tiny lamps began.
Well, a fair day was done. He had known defeat
Upon the heights. But, in the plain with man,
It is not necessary to repeat
The tale of failure. Suddenly a span
Of weary fly-bit steeds halted before
The orange light at the post-office door.

He went within, and waited in the line
Of chatting townsmen eloquent, while slow,
Behind the grille, the mail-clerk saturnine
Over the letters hovered to and fro.
There was a smell of garlic, sweat, and wine.
After a quarter of an hour or so,
The clerk tossed out to him, beyond his hope,
A pamphlet, and a large blue envelope,





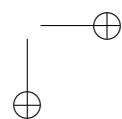
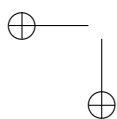
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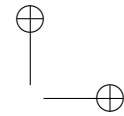
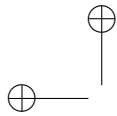
Formally addressed, “Distintissimo Signor,”
And so on. He moved slow under the dim
Lamp. He had never seen that fist before.
But as he read a quiver through his slim
Shoulders ran suddenly. A quick triumph o’er
His face gleamed, till it half transfigured him.
Few ever get such letters. Those who do
Are very apt to look transfigured too.

It was a letter such as a mamma
Might write a petted but a hopeful son,
Who, born with wit and spirit et cetera,
Most unexpectedly to her had done
The expected. Therefore her sensations are
Mixed. All her fears are fled, her joys begun.
The writer was a most maternal man.
His letter showed it. “Dear Master,” it began.

The name of the first critic in all Italy
Surged o’er a flourish at the page’s end.
He wrote not, as his wont was, noncommittally,
But said succinctly what he did intend.
His compliments were turned extremely prettily,
Though it went against his conscience to commend.
And as the boy beneath the post-lamp read,
The words were wine and music in his head.

The fiercest and most poisonous thing men know
Is praise. It makes us fools beyond our powers
However great. The pleasant inward glow,
Like a spiritual cancer, eats and devours.
And presently we’re a disgusting show,
And all our works are good because they’re ours.
And we think scorn of other men’s affairs,
For the sufficient reason that they’re theirs.





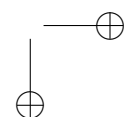
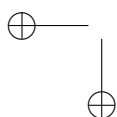
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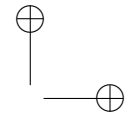
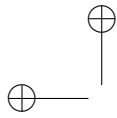
My boy had not learned this. In point of fact
In his whole life he never had a chance
To find it out, no reason to subtract
One tittle from his inborn arrogance.
From the first gush, the hot stream never slacked.
I own I envy him that circumstance.
Though given to writing moralizing lays,
I must confess that I am fond of praise.

His eyes grew warm. Those pleasant phrases seemed
To burn his body through the envelope.
Music was in him, as in a man who dreamed
New arts entire, vaster in scheme and scope.
Words wing'd and armed, that mounted and that gleamed,
Touched with wild fantasy, delicious hope,
Clamoured in the vaulted spaces of his soul.
He trembled with a bliss beyond control.

A light struck on his face. Across the way
The farmacia gleamed with colored glass.
He glanced at the light's brilliant interplay,
And saw the druggist's wife, a strapping lass
With a bosom that a Rubens might portray,
After his manner, flamboyant, coarse, and crass.
But I to your base realists won't truckle.
The mighty girl was just at point to suckle

A baby that with emphasis demanded
A meal, which was, it seemed, a trifle late,
And therefore howled against the underhanded
And double-dealing tyranny of Fate –
A bit unreasonable to be candid.
That double-dealing was supremely great,
For the lady, the unvarnished truth to tell,
Might have been wetnurse to Pantagruel.





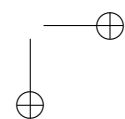
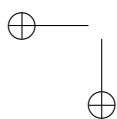
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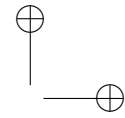
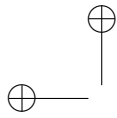
That scene domestic jarred on him somehow,
As might the presence of an alien power.
A sense of something lost saddened his brow,
And his triumphant look grew a shade sour.
What was it that the Fates could disallow
To him in this their most benignant hour?
Impatiently his spirit turned from framing
A nameless thought, not better for the naming.

Saddened he turned away. He could not touch
Then, or thenceforward, the unknown beauty, or find
Solemnity he felt, that seemed to clutch,
From the obscurer byways of the mind,
At him and lose him. Did it matter much?
He had seen something that left him splendidly blind.
Splendor took hold upon him. Words with wings
Sprang up within him, as an eagle springs,

Safe from the vulgar, safe, circling alone,
Undazzled, staring through the purple vault
Into the very soul of the Unknown,
Flawless and fleckless and without a fault.
His pinions beat not. Unwearied he'll disown
All lesser skies, and carry by assault
Precipitous heaven. Splendor! O unkindness
Of too much light that brings darkness and blindness!

He sought an inn. Myself have often noted
Poets in gestation are apt to seek an inn,
Whether unto intemperance devoted,
Or wishing to escape their kith and kin,
For reasons which from time to time are quoted
By men whose cynicism's gay as sin,
And who, when they're especially blasé,
Are not aware what their relations say.





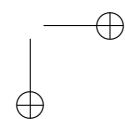
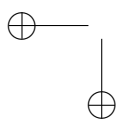
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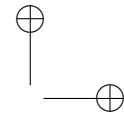
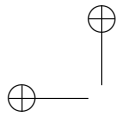
It was a gloomy, liquorish, little hole.
He ordered cognac and sate silent there.
The burning drink rhymed with his burning soul.
His body tingled to every tiniest hair.
A sense, half restlessness, half languor, stole
Through his wild spirit. He became aware
Suddenly of a presence in the room,
A woman silent in the squalid gloom.

By sight he knew her. So did half the town
By more than that. Only the day before,
It's safe to say that she'd have set him down
For a schoolboy wholly useless to a whore.
For the moment she was not one. The small frown
On the boy's domed forehead seemed to make him more
Than she'd supposed. This judgement elevated her
Above the function for which God created her.

She made the approach and got there. Suddenly
He found himself as on the heights declaiming
Whole pages of Stecchettish poetry,
While the girl flushed under her rouge red-flaming.
To pluck the heart out of her mystery
Were hard. I fancy though that she was aiming
At being, all unknown to the police,
For half an hour a femme inspiratrice.

The woman always suffers in that rôle.
I don't know why. It's not enough to be
The guide and lodestar of another's soul
One has to deal with one's own mystery.
Give him your wine, there's poison in your bowl,
Unless he pours himself. And then you'll see
The inspirer vanish, and instead the woman
Stand forth, and the poet, man, perhaps too human.





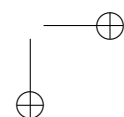
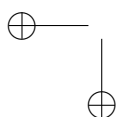
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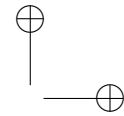
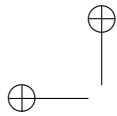
The rôle breaks down or she does. In this case
It did. She felt the waning of the charm
Almost at once. The intellectual pace
Puzzled her first, and then produced alarm.
Her brutal eyes no longer sought his face.
She felt a vague presentiment of harm,
While words she understood not from him poured.
She wasn't the last woman that he bored.

Suddenly the door swung open. There appeared
In the mean room a flaring uniform.
A dark-eyed man with a tyrannic beard
Cast at the woman a glance wild and warm,
That promised more than verses. Softly she leered
At the apparition, who was more the norm
Of her experience. With scarcely an excuse
She left the poet stewing in his juice.

She had come and seen. She fled. Turning at the door
On the Lieutenant's arm, she saw the glare
In the boy's eyes. He was wounded to the core,
Or so it seemed. Her gallant's conquering stare
Outfaced him, and put salt upon his sore.
Tears trembled on his eyelids one could swear.
Laughing, that look of anguish she put by,
But made the horns against the evil eye.

The gall falls in the cup of adolescence,
Drop after bitter drop. One does not know
How the Fates concentrate that acid essence.
One has been happy till an hour ago.
And then froths up unseemly effervescence.
We are wounded, or an automatic woe
Possesses us. And tragic to relate
Adolescence lasts till at least ninety-eight.





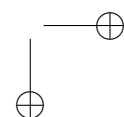
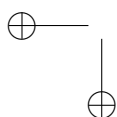
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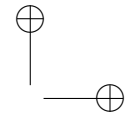
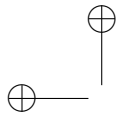
The sense of pain died slow, as all pain dies,
However swift it come. He sate there still,
With the half-filled glass and brooding in his eyes,
Dreaming some vengeance, feeding the thwarted will
Upon such fodder as indemnifies
Humiliated amour propre, until
Another gust of pleasure from the pain
Took birth in some far country of his brain.

This time it was as if he saw a ship
Manned for the launching by the purple sea,
Whose glory had been wine raised to his lip
All through that day. A new infinity
Of thought seemed opening to him through a rip
In a storm-cloud of the soul, – huge radiancy
Of unknown suns, the wild unconscious light
That makes us poets whether or no we write.

He found himself grasping at a thought, and asking
Some stranger in himself what it might mean.
He felt himself stretched to some effort tasking
All that he was and would be. The strange scene
Within him was real as the ocean basking
Under the morning. And he hung between
Those two wild worlds that make our mirth and woe, –
Those two wild worlds, neither of which we know.

He took his pencil. Stray phrase and verse came sliding
Out of his brain. They seemed to droop and die,
As they were fixed on paper. His own deriding
Spirit, like an enemy, stood mocking by.
They grew such dust as kings that have been hiding
In their last ambush, when the Egyptian sky
Sees them again, and the excavator stands
“Marvelling at their withered and imperious hands.”





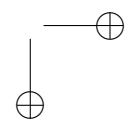
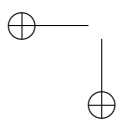
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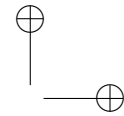
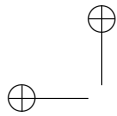
Battles are less than that war with the Unknown
That will not yield its secret. As we grope
Into the darkness, or hear the voice's tone,
The words escape us, or are past our scope.
We fight the resolvéd angel all alone,
And crucify ourselves against a hope,
Defying the future, as it ignores the past,
That light will reach us somehow with a blast,

Transcending what we have to give or take,
Something that will illuminate the dusk
Of mediocrity, with power to mock
The life we lead, more living than this husk
Of feeling or believing, that can shake
Fire over all this desperate coil obfusk,
That makes us dolts and madmen, in despite
Of a universe whose leit-motiv is light.

He sate there silent, chewing o'er a phrase
That seemed with giant connotation freighted,
Some visible darkness that could be made to blaze
By a spirit that conceived, labored, and waited.
He knew that he must grapple all his days
With similar problems, that he had been fated
From the beginning to struggle in strange gloom
To bring thought living from the dragon-womb

Of fancy. "The Ship! The Ship! Why does she sail
"On such irradiant seas? What symbol towers
"Over these waters? How can I prevail,
"Unless I grasp this meaning? All the powers
"I feel will perish, if this dream should fail.
"A world's to make in a boy's idle hours."
Up from his depths like a salmon a verse swirled:
"Make strong the prow, and sail to front the world."





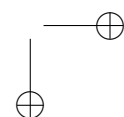
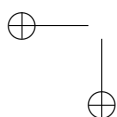
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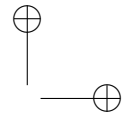
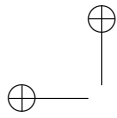
Vision makes what it sees. He did not see
The visionary whole, although he knew,
If there were meaning in futurity,
Something would presently be working through
The integument concealing utterly
What seemed to fight and struggle into view,
Now back again to the dark depths withdrawn,
Now glowing upward like a stormy dawn.

Vision comes ere the thought, as a sea-beast,
Surging from abysses, creates for us the deep
Where pearls have lain that dazzle all the East
With their barbaric light. And we who sleep
Dream what with dawn and thought can be increased,
Magnified, transfigured, changed, until we leap
Forward, irresistible, clothed in the dream
Of the reality that does not seem.

So my boy sate, fingering the verse that came
Before clear comprehension. Yet he felt
As it were the touch of Pentecostal flame
That could commingle things diverse, and melt
Opposites together. He ceased to play a game
Of verse, but with some living factor dealt,
Traversing all the scheme of Fate and Time,
And over reason, and transcending rhyme.

He could not solve it then, and fell defeated
Back on himself, though briefly he had known
Something too noble for him, loftily seated,
Pure and transplendent, on its luminous throne.
And back to actuality he retreated,
To find himself in that base inn alone,
Forsaken, in a dull room, coarse and crass,
With a head as empty as his brandy-glass.

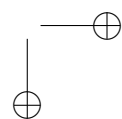
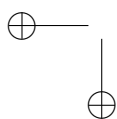


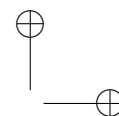
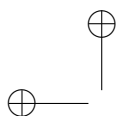


CANTO I: IMAGO

Homeward he turned down many a narrow way,
Under dim lamps. The druggist's light was out.
He heard the small waves whicker in the bay.
And what was Poetry? And what this doubt
Of himself, that came its sombre siege to lay
Around him? What was this agony about,
That was driving him almost in tears to bed?
He could not say. Nor could he e'er have said.

Only he caught, through a too well-lighted pane,
A glimpse of a too splendid uniform
And of a woman, as was entirely plain,
In an embrace that seemed to him too warm.
Fancy fell dead as a doornail in his brain,
Which felt the sweep and triumph of a storm
Of bitter facts, of every charm denuded.
O Dream return, solace of the deluded!





CANTO II: THE FOSCARINA

Questa e colei che all'arco mio sonoro
pose la nova corda. . .

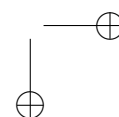
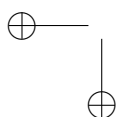
ALLA DIVINA ELEONORA DUSE
INTRODUCTORY VERSES TO FRANCESCA DA RIMINI
G. d'Annunzio, 1902

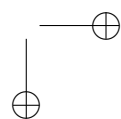
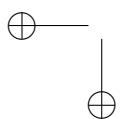
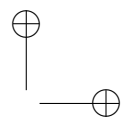
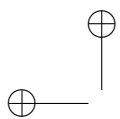
She come forward – right forward – she looked out straight
at us with that blindish look. . .

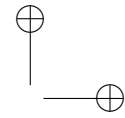
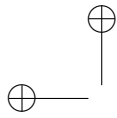
MRS. BATHURST
Rudyard Kipling, 1904

. . . I do not like to state my results, knowing as I do the
carping disposition of some people, especially of the professors
of poetry at the present day.

Description of Greece
Pausanias, *circa* 176







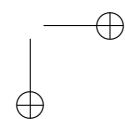
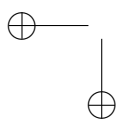
CANTO II: THE FOSCARINA

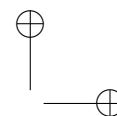
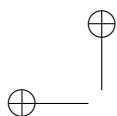
I find my hero's got to have a name.
It's one of the conventions (they are few)
Which have some reason. I should be to blame,
Dear reader, to expect too much of you.
Therefore I'll give him one. It is the same
He gave that portrait of himself he drew
With such affection in a work once read
With varying emotions, and now dead

As the great woman who was crucified
And tortured in those pages no more turned.
Stelio Éffrena that name shall be, betide
Me weal or woe. What passion was that burned
Up in that giant flame! Not to deride
I choose that name, for I am not concerned
With mockery at another's fate, nor would
Do anything to hurt him, if I could.

And whoso reads herein only to find
A thirty-year-old scandal hashed up new,
I here repudiate utterly. He's blind,
Stupid, and trivial, and can't see through
The thinnest millstone. Agony of mind,
The spirit warped by the twisting of the screw
Of Fate concern me. I will dig no dirt
For dirt's sake, and for hurt's sake will not hurt.

He's past all hurt, though he may be alive,
Technically speaking. The genius that could flame,
Unparagoned thirty years, I must contrive
To paint, and therefore he must have a name.
And ere the shadow and the night arrive,
I must evoke him in his shame and fame
By my black art. A name's the wizard's chance.
From the dark, Stelio Éffrena, advance!





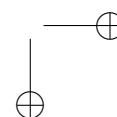
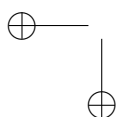
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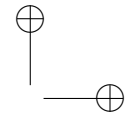
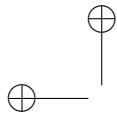
The circle's drawn, the black word's said, the spell
Commands you. Is that your spirit there before?
That little soul, could it look on Heaven and Hell?
That resolution, was it fit for war?
I cannot pass a judgement on you well.
I have not been invited, and deplore
The analysis which I perform on you.
And yet some power behind compels me to

This wrong, if it be a wrong. If it be right,
It's much the same. Though with a seven-fold will
I grappled with the angel in the night,
The unseen impulse would control me still,
As you, too, Stelio, were controlled. The sprite
Troubles our nature, and we must fulfil
The commandment in despite of legislation,
Inclination, desperation, and damnation.

I'm in a dream. And, reader, you may laugh
Your clever head off. It may be that passion
Feebly informs these words which are the chaff
Of wheat I thrashed in an inferior fashion.
But what are you, you simpering photograph
Of a shadow? The reality Parnassian
I felt, if it were burning up this paper,
To you were nothing but a farthing taper.

You seated in your comfortable chair,
Being bored by me and Stelio! If you knew
To what extent your hypocritic air
Of understanding did not deceive us two,
It might give you pause for thought, though thought is rare,
And without question seldom troubles you,
Being on the whole unprofitable and hard,
And a general nuisance whether to bored or bard.





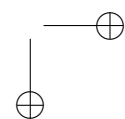
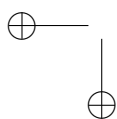
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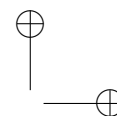
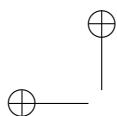
As Mr. Browning said, “Appears Verona,”
In a long poem “the Gods call ‘Sordello,’
“And men call balderdash,” though that’s a boner
Worthy of a time that has not known his fellow.
Our poetry’s the withered gourd of Jonah.
Promise, we trust, is in that sere and yellow.
Over our uniform, mechanic time,
There yet may triumph the tremendous rhyme.

“Appears Verona,” city of the plain,
Looped by the Adige, all ruin and plaster,
Yet somehow striking the fantastic brain.
A town where once Theodoric was master,
And where Can Grande harked to Dante’s strain,
Makes any normal heart beat a bit faster,
And the romantic his eagle youth renews
Between the Capulets and Montagues.

“Appears Verona.” When I came there last,
We raced a Rolls-Royce through the sunset valley,
And as we were going very much too fast
Were stopped by the milizia stradale.
We harkened to their eloquence aghast,
Pretending ignoranza annormale.
They let us go. And even now I rejoice
At the things I heard ’em say to the Rolls-Royce.

“Appears Verona.” Damn it! Do appear,
Verona, if you really mean to come
In view. It is the eighty-second year
Of the nineteenth century, and there’s a hum
In your perennial Roman theatre,
Which is crowded by an audience as dumb
And soulless as the crowd that used to strain
Capacity in Gallienus’ reign.





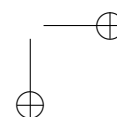
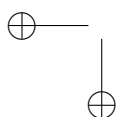
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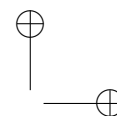
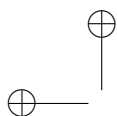
Stelio Éffrena was sitting by the side
Of Daniele Glauro his especial friend.
Somebody gave them seats. It is the pride
Of an Italian never to attend
Opera or theatre, unless supplied
By some one else. It's folly to expend
Good money. But the fact's in mystery shrouded
That such performances are often crowded.

The sun was sloping from the heights of day.
The air was cool and liquid, gentle fire.
And Romeo and Juliet was the play
They waited for, not knowing what a gyre
Fate's eagle flew, in the uncanny way
He has. He soars, or his strange pinions tire
For weariness, the silly Gods know why,
And plummet-like he drops from the mid-sky.

Shakespeare is funny in an alien tongue,
As Dante is in English, I must say.
In French Georges Sand, her other sins among,
Turned "As You Like It" into "Sil Vous Plait."
And the sublimest language ever sung
"Like Bottom is translated." Far away
The foreigner hearkens through ass's ears
The stellar music of crystalline spheres.

The thought is there. The countenance is veiled,
Impenetrable. Unimaginable grace
And phrasing diamond-clear as ever grailed
Wine of the mind, are minished to a base
Mechanic equivalent, that has been staled
By another people's custom commonplace.
Nevertheless Verona, on the whole,
Is a good place for Juliet's burning rôle.





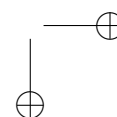
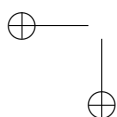
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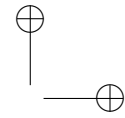
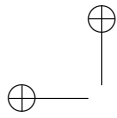
There was a Juliet. Capulet's crowded hall,
On the Roman stage, lives under the sweet sky,
Where in soft light the arrowy swallows call
Procne's immemorial and tragic cry.
Sunset transforms the mimic festival.
The crowd is still. She comes. And every eye
Lightens. Men hold their breath. The sense of sight
Captures all sense. The girl herself is light,

And, by a magic hitherto unknown
Drains from the original beauty all the sweet,
By divine trick of attitude or tone.
Her cheek untinged glows with amorous heat
When the masked Romeo kisses her alone.
Her hands are cool flame. Motion of her feet
Is motion of triumphant wings, a shock,
Of beauty, even women will not mock

Tonight over the wine and pasta 'sciutta.
The audience quakes. Whence this transcendent art,
Unheralded? This voice that is the tutor
Of melody? This motion that is heart
Of absolute passion, and equal coadjutor
With the poet who, three centuries apart
From us, gave utterance in an unknown tongue
To the enchantment for ever sad and young?

For ever sad and young! All her life long,
From girlhood to those late and tragic years
Too full of passion that was overstrong,
In her wrath, or in the tempest of her tears,
Those words would be her leit-motiv, in wrong
Or right, in youth or age. She still appears
Whether in life or death, or good or bad,
In every fortune, for ever young and sad.





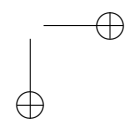
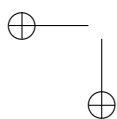
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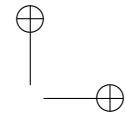
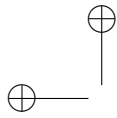
Muttered Daniele Glauro, as the flush
Died from her white cheek, “O Eternal God,
“What actress!” The sharp whisper smote the hush
Brutally, as if he struck it with a rod.
His was the first breath of the storm and rush
Of sound, as the crescendo bravos trod
The death-struck silence down. Wild cries contended
Like soldiers in a battle. The first act ended.

Stelio sat numb with a presentiment
Forming in him, like a flood behind a dam
Of ice-blocks. All his nature was intent
Upon this spiritual cryptogram,
The poet and this incarnation sent.
He felt within the conflict and the jam
Of dream and thought driven down some wild course
By the soul’s energy risen with all the force

Of his young life in spate. That form that walked
All music on the stage, that came and went
For the dead poet, that was silent, or that talked
All beauty, the essence and the instrument
Of song, destroyed some obstacle that balked
His powers, at length united with concent
Harmonious, orchestral intermingling
Of all his strengths which leaped together tingling.

It’s a queer fact he did not see that girl
As Glauro saw her. Ultimate romance
Was in her like a bolt that the Gods hurl
For Daniele, divine lightning in her glance,
And grievous loveliness that made Heaven swirl
And earth-born spirits cower and look askance.
But Stelio saw her infinite flower unfold
With an eye unmoving, serpentine, and cold





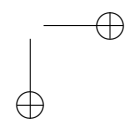
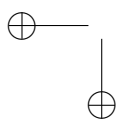
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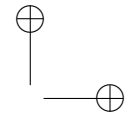
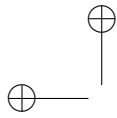
As charity. She was lovely and all art
To her finger-tips, the very type and sprite
Of expression, and created for the part
He knew he had come into the world to write.
He felt vast tides come hurling through his heart
And words form on his lips, alive with light.
God let him see his victory complete,
But not how beauty may contain defeat.

Sexless, cool, imperturbable he assayed her.
At every change of countenance or pose,
Or rise or falling of her voice he weighed her
As a calm soldier weighs his friends and foes.
'Neath his impassioned mask the masquerader
Sate quiet, nor deemed it fitting to disclose
How his strange thought ran, whether bad or good,
Which in the sequel she never understood.

In the gas-lit green-room, back of the Roman stage,
He met her first. The Foscara stood
Pale as the anemone when March's rage
Has spent itself in the New England wood,
And the white petals softly disengage
From the sheath, and there's a motion in our blood
Premonitory, and leaves are shooting forth,
And the air sounds of wildfowl sailing North.

White as the anemone and quite as frail,
With a look as if she saw you not, not blind,
But as if commercing beyond the starry pale
With terrible existence, hidden behind
Appearance, where gigantic powers prevail
And terrify the small observing mind,
Though certainly its real origin
Was the problem, could the girl afford an inn





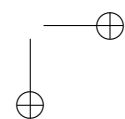
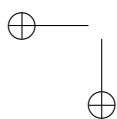
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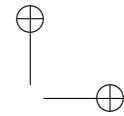
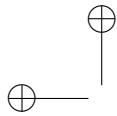
After all this applause. One thinks of money
Too passionately, if it's too hard to get,
Something that wealthy folk consider funny,
And make remarks about. I've seldom met
A man or woman who could see the sunny
Side of things, when too heavily in debt.
To the Foscarina ten extra lire then
Were a great deal more than cheers or bright young men –

Paying her compliments on her sublime art.
She wished the two of them would go away,
So the manager could whisper her apart
What the troupe's income amounted to that day,
And her percentage. Like daggers in her heart
Were memories of bills that were to pay.
Therefore her eyes were set on some ideal,
Like Plato's, that for her was the one real.

Long afterwards, when she told him these things, he
Heard with astonishment the sorry tale
Of poverty, misery, anxiety,
Her sad companionship that did not fail.
He then felt an artistic sympathy,
That did him honor, and will not cross my trail,
I hope. But now, in her apparent hour
Of triumph, he saw embodied his own power.

And her transpiercing look took hold of him.
He was caught, as it were, in that cool-flaming hand
For his own purpose. Some symbol seemed to swim
Up from the depths he did not understand.
Why does her glance so penetrate our dim
Reality? It is something to command
And use to express passion of all degrees.
She is Art itself, the unconscious force that sees,





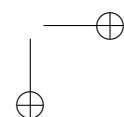
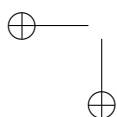
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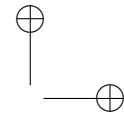
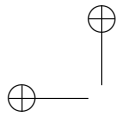
And magically shapes. “Those lips shall form
“Words I conceive and thoughts that I combine.
“That passionate spirit shall vitalize and warm
“The ice-cold stellar beauty of my line.
“In emotions I imagine she shall storm,
“Making the glory I prefigure mine.”
I don’t say that I read his thought aright,
But he and his companion said good night,

And went to Glauro’s room to have a chat
About the Juliet, and drink glass after glass
Of cheap vermouth. A long, long time they sat,
Talking youth’s balderdash that is, alas,
Like age’s, uninformed, naïf, and flat,
And fully as prejudiced, and quite as crass.
But finally the conversation took
Direction, for Daniele had a book

They could not read. In the barbaric tongue
Of Germany ’twas writ. Between the lines,
The fly-tracks of black Gothic type among,
Were steel-plates, plans, cross-sections, and designs.
Herr Schliemann knew not, as the pick-axe swung
In old Mycenae, where he sank his mines,
Just what his excavating flair might mean
To an Italian poet of nineteen.

Out of the abysm and the gulf of time
Personality made huge by poets loomed,
Colossal for catastrophe or crime,
By the laborious German’s spade exhumed,
Challenging reason and inviting rhyme.
The sons of Atreus, to disaster doomed,
Out of their half-historic darkness surged,
Bringing with them poetry as they emerged.





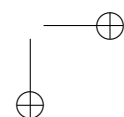
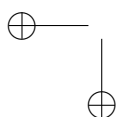
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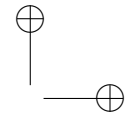
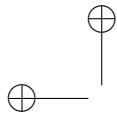
Thus it was another German turned the trick.
Those ancient chiefs, hidden in masks of gold,
And issuing from their dark millenniums thick,
Had him suddenly in their portentous hold.
In Stelio's mind came the peculiar click
Of discrete notions that together rolled
Into one thought – the woman's sight of things
Invisible, and that pageantry of Kings.

The House of Atreus caused a lot of grief
With cannibalism, incest, and what not.
Fair Helen, fleeing with the Phrygian chief,
And making Ilion's topless towers too hot
To hold her, offers the one touch of relief.
For ten years she escaped from the whole lot.
We can't. But think of the matrimonial chaos
When she had to make it up with Menelaus.

But it is strange, that family's effect
On literature, for not a day goes by
But they trouble our existence by direct
Or indirect means. That horrid dynasty,
Stupid, cruel, vengeful, strikes the intellect.
Three thousand years they have held their tyranny.
And Stelio felt their influence accursed,
Not their last celebrant, and not their worst. –

Hot field of Argos, country of the horse,
How well he got the gorgeous mise-en-scène!
Evoking with a superhuman force
The gold-masked rulers and their queens again,
Their fury and their vengeance and remorse.
Their living tragedy renewed its reign
In all the bitterness and bestiality
For the woman who could look beyond reality.





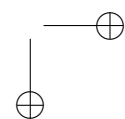
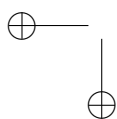
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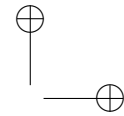
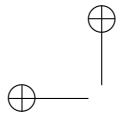
For two strange acts, it's a terrific play,
Full of fire, sick impulse, and a hateful star.
And then it tails off in a trivial way
Out of the tragic into the bizarre.
Horace upon this subject said his say,
Showing how the distance 'twixt them is not far.
Stelio dealt in sublimity, and thus
Is never far from the ridiculous.

But I anticipate. It's not yet written,
Nor will be these ten years. But he is fated.
The woman in the ugly room gas litten
Has violated (as she'll be violated)
Virgin ideas. Into him she has smitten
Her image. Something has been consummated.
In the womb of thought the embryo takes shape.
It is the woman who has done the rape

By force of clear art and her mystic eyes
That dwelled on the eternal, it appeared,
So masking her struggle under hostile skies
Against the small and obstinate things she feared.
He would think differently, if he were wise,
Which does not happen ere one has a beard,
Or, often, after. Worse luck he did not learn
Beauty that for its own sweet sake can burn.

That's why the "City of the Dead" is dead,
And could not be the "City of the Living."
That's why the heart surrendered to the head,
And there was so much taking and no giving.
That's why the blood is very much too red,
And the gold of thought escapes for all his sieving,
And the phrase compact of fire turns mortal ice,
And the mind shivers at the cold device.





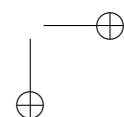
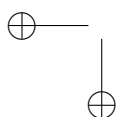
CANTO II: THE FOSCARINA

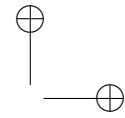
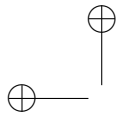
But now, at first conception, heat and light
Are in the idea. There's a sensual pulse
Throbbing in his spirit. He sees as from a height
The country of creation, where results
Are hard to attain, however clear the sight.
He knows that, and what black eclipse occults
Stars that he dreams of. Even this manifold
Heat knows it vibrates in ethereal cold.

Is he aware of living? Is not this art,
For which his soul is weaponed and prepared,
And which by daily effort grows a part
Of him, is it not now the foe declared
Of life? And in some way has not the cart
Got quite before the horse? The light that flared
To illuminate men and their eccentric ways,
Does it not already, merely for blazing, blaze?

I ask these questions, wise from the event,
Which sometime, reader, I shall reach somehow,
But being of a speculative bent,
Cannot refrain propounding of them now.
I quite admit the narrative interest went
To Hell many stanzas back, which does not cow
My spirit, and abandoned to my rhymes
I really glory in my crimes at times.

Stelio woke up next morning indisposed,
(All his life long he was naturally dyspeptic.)
And inclined to think visions that were disclosed
To him the day before a bit proleptic.
Some flexible part of the soul felt ankylosed.
He needed spiritual antiseptic.
It might have been mere melancholy youth,
Or Daniele's really terrible vermouth.





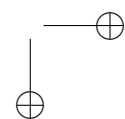
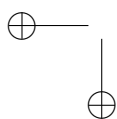
CANTO II: THE FOSCARINA

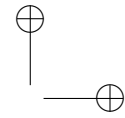
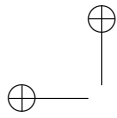
He had a copy of his first published book
Upon his table, the precocious fruit
Of what he felt was power. He liked the look
Of the volume, his first run in the pursuit
Of fame elusive. Happily he took
It up, and turned the pages with a mute
Satisfaction. And his forehead grew serener.
He'd give that copy to the Foscara.

He meditated an appropriate line
To inscribe upon the fly-leaf, and he scrawled
And scribbled in his effort to refine
The sentiment, revamped and overhauled
The image to make it proper to the shrine.
For a quarter of an hour he sate enthralled
By his compliment, and made it and remade it,
Till it should be worthy of the man who paid it.

Finally he wrote it down upon the page
As if with a rush. It gave one the impression
That the poet breathing with a Delphic rage
Had snatched a moment from the Muses' session,
From which it's always hard to disengage
One's self, to raise the theatrical profession
Out of its squalid misery by praising
Some one, who possibly was worth while raising.

Then with the book in hand he took his way
To the mean hotel where she had found a room.
Meekly she made him welcome. Her distraught,
Beyond-seeing eyes, still full of a sweet gloom
Obsessed him suddenly. What he meant to say
Seemed to have lost the cachet and perfume
Of rhetoric. It wasn't quite the same
As he'd supposed. It was rather smoke than flame,





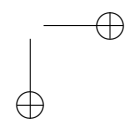
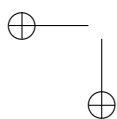
CANTO II: THE FOSCARINA

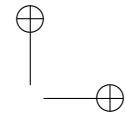
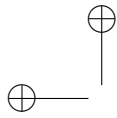
And hid the thought he meant it to reveal.
She took that orient pearl with timid grace.
Taking never was her forte. She made him feel
Awkward. Her diffident and lovely face
Seemed to force something in him to conceal
Itself from her. We hate our commonplace
Side, but it's there. And genius, I suspect,
Is not quite unaware of its defect.

But why was he uncomfortable? Young, proud,
And talking with a lovely girl, his powers
Just breaking forth, why should he stand as cowed
Before her, as one who meets his match and cowers
Unexpectedly to himself, himself a crowd
That hoots him? The minutes seemed unhappy hours.
What was he face to face with, that compelled
Revaluation of all views he held? –

Revaluation he refused to make
In the teeth of the compulsion. Yet he knew
Even then regret for what he could not wake
In himself. She was the nearer of the two
Unto beauty whose measure he had wit to take
And feel, the curious beauty of passing through
The world, without a hope or a misgiving,
Devoted to the reality of living,

Thoughtful, but not too much obsessed by thought,
Finding more joy in uncorrupted feeling,
That has the gift to judge things as they ought
To be judged, creating emotion by revealing
Emotion, not as an effect that's sought,
But as a fact that will not bear concealing,
The primitive thing transcending time and distance,
The end and the beginning of existence –





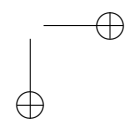
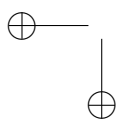
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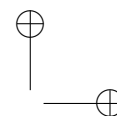
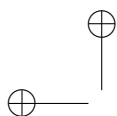
Primitive as an atom's primitive,
Complex as the simplest atom is complex
A thing that makes us die, and makes us live,
A crown on our heads, a millstone round our necks,
The ultimate thing that alone has power to give
Beauty to wisdom, art, religion, sex.
Without it we are hypocrites foul-minded,
Wandering in darkness, by delusion blinded,

Poor spirits sense-enchanted, no more young
However short our years, however long.
The honey-drops that fell from Shelley's tongue
Are full of bitter. But he was not wrong.
He had tasted gall, or he had never sung,
With fearful truth in the undying song,
The exquisite agony, transcendent grief,
Of feeling perishing of unbelief.

She showed up Stelio to himself somehow.
He brought the interview to a clumsy end,
And fled defeated, with a troubled brow,
Feeling that there was something to defend
About him, something the Gods would not allow
To be in his possession. He found his friend
Daniele, and light came back into the day.
These momentary troubles, what are they?

The Foscarina in her fourth-floor room
Opened the book and read the inscription sprawling,
Which told her that she was a flower whose bloom
Implied the resurrection of her calling.
On the titlepage was cited an author whom
But few admire – dull English verse appalling.
What power, was it a God's? was it a demon's?
Ever made Stelio quote Felicia Hemans,





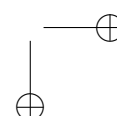
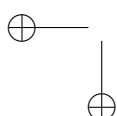
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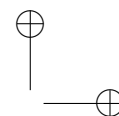
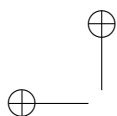
When he might have quoted Heine, Baudelaire,
Leopardi, Mickiévich, Lermontov,
Or Byron? I've noticed poets have a flair
For writers whom their friends know nothing of.
He chose the English Sappho, I could swear
Because Daniele, curiously enough
Had never heard of her. Fate's random shots
Seldom made Oscar Wilde quote Isaac Watts.

The Foscarina read calmly along.
There were the usual signs of fledgling wings,
Imitations scrambled with original song,
Stray harmonies trembling from unsure strings,
With here and there an image fierce and strong,
And the incontestable gift for seeing things
And getting down on paper the thing seen,
Without too much concern what it might mean.

This is a modern failing. At that time
In Devonshire, in a school at Westward Ho,
There was another lad, in prose and rhyme
Destined to gleam for sixty years or so,
He had the knack, raised to a pitch sublime,
To paint the colors of an afterglow,
A sea, a mountain, a man, and in his heart
Was always wondering whether it was art.

Voltaire does not delay to sketch the smoke
Billowing above Poltava, or the stain
On the foul snow, where the Swedish phalanx broke.
Some more electric contact with the brain
He seeks. He makes his point and cracks his joke,
And invisible impressions that remain
Are made, which have a verve and force generic,
Superior to word-pictures atmospheric,





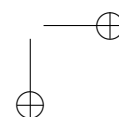
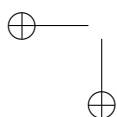
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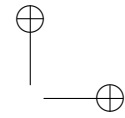
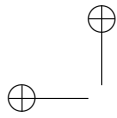
Such as our times have made *ad nauseam*,
Believing, since it was not done before,
That it must be worth while, of which I am
Not sure. I think our ways will be a bore
In 2030, but don't give a damn.
The notion I desire to underscore
Is this: Methods come in, and, thank God! go.
But there's a soul sometimes, which we must know.

Some inner truth prevails despite the outer.
Pope will survive for all his bout-rimés.
And Byron, though in some ways I'm a doubter,
Isn't forgotten even in our days.
But who cares when the futuristic spouter
Serves ancient tripe in novel rechauffés?
The new technique diverts the shallow mind.
New spiritual shores are hard to find.

I do not think the Foscara thought
All this. It would be an anachronism
In the first place, or that she even ought
To have thought so. Psychological solecism
I oft commit, but, by experience taught,
Will never try to force my criticism
Into her mouth. I rather think instead
She was quite interested as she read.

She thought she missed something that might come later,
And that some lines were lovely (which they are),
And that cleverness had more than once turned traitor
To beauty which it was too bad to mar.
And she felt grateful to the dedicator,
And also that perhaps he might go far.
How far! Thank God this moment there's no knowing
How far, how far we all of us are going.





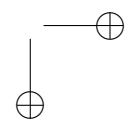
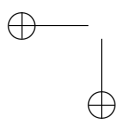
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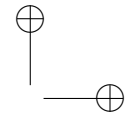
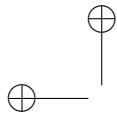
She dropped the book and started memorizing
Some vehement exclamatory part
She was to play soon. It's a fact surprising
That her remarkable mimetic art
Nearly always took to rôles unappetizing,
Which virtue of her intellect and heart
Transformed to nobler matter, in despite
Of playwrights and the rot they are wont to write.

Like many another she was already cast
For heroine in her own tragedy,
And would memorize things spiritual that surpassed
Hugo, Sardou, Ibsen and company.
Real triumph and defeat that would contrast
Horribly with the unreality,
Were in creation for her. She foreknew
Her future – as you and I are wont to do.

Stelio, with his friend Glauro, meanwhile chattered
Of literature and life in a café,
Giving his opinion quite as if it mattered
Upon the various topics of the day.
His pearls of thought he indolently scattered
Before his comrade in the usual way,
Lightly enough, with no design ulterior
Other than youth's desire to seem superior.

But Daniele for the moment for the game
Seemed to lack heart. His conversation flagged
And faltered, and went obviously lame,
As if within him some strange weight he dragged.
Stelio on the contrary began to flame
With a sharp interest that never limped or lagged,
Full up of Latin exuberance immense,
And active thought born of a quickened sense.





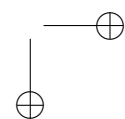
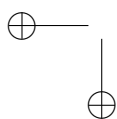
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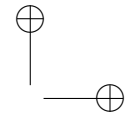
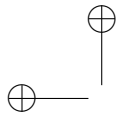
He talked of poetry and politics,
Philosophy, religion, science, art,
And how he yearned to kick against the pricks
Of custom, and how the great must stand apart
From common judgement, and how our vision tricks
Our thought, and how a poem gets its start
In regions which few poets have explored,
When he saw Daniele looked extremely bored,

Against his habit. Suddenly with a grim,
Resolved expression, Stelio was not prepared
At all for, his best friend abandoned him,
And left *sans phrase*. Stelio was almost scared,
Troubled by presentiment unclear and dim,
That grew no whit more lucid, as he stared,
With a mixture of surprise and unbelief,
At Glauro's quite untouched apéritif.

He sate there, his mind rambling: "Why should France
"Be full of writers? Paris is the place.
"Rome has mere dullards." Flame-like arrogance
Drove the blood flushing over all his face.
"Yet I have something in me to entrance
"Imagination of a passionate race.
"There is new life in this land. There is in me
"Responding an unknown immensity.

"There is the pulse of what I see and feel.
"I will make our very vices come alive."
(He did) "Wild thought clashes in me like steel
"Forces as of my own hill-freshets drive
"Headlong through me. Vitalities that reel
"And dance for joy, that can and will survive,
"Enchant me, the vast gust that knows not measure,
"The power of things that's peril and that's pleasure."





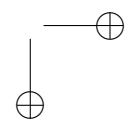
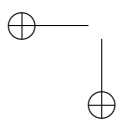
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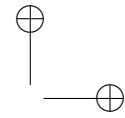
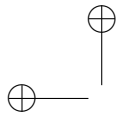
Pleasure! The Foscarina, in a gleam,
Naked in beauty before him. In a trice
An adolescent and voluptuous dream
Danced in his cave of intellectual ice.
He felt a contrast, brutal and extreme,
Between her beauty and some dread device
Of thought that his own bitter brain cold-flaming
Was irrevocably and absolutely framing,

And stared that beauty down, seeing within
His own lack clearly now for the first time,
Knowing himself for one not born to win
That sort of thing. A separateness sublime,
Independent or of virtue or of sin,
And that made relationship a sort of crime,
(He knew it now) had set him quite apart
From all things, always excepting that fierce art

Scarce known yet, that must conquer, the Baal hidden
That he must worship. In a flash he saw
The creating mind that never can be chidden
On those base terms that feebler men call law.
Here is the wing'd horse waiting to be ridden.
And what else in the world is worth a straw?
Breathless he gave the answer and heard the roll
Of timeless thunders echo through his soul.

"How should I feel as other men may feel,
"I who can never cease to contemplate,
"Who probe a secret, and who must reveal
"What I discover, by the decree of fate?
"Only to my own being I appeal
"Hereafter. Light and Dark, and Love and Hate
"Must change their natures yet remain complete,
"When I have tried them with my cold and heat.



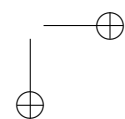
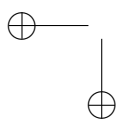


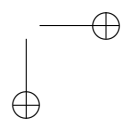
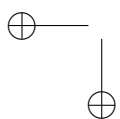
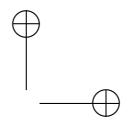
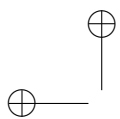
CANTO II: THE FOSCARINA

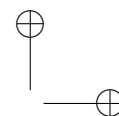
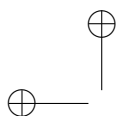
“They are ores I work in and shall comprehend.
“Their alloys and their amalgams I shall test,
“Determining how they shall mix and blend,
“And into what strange moulds they shall be pressed.
“I shall adventure to the bitter end
“Of Art, and there at length make manifest
“Divine ideas, even if I must break
“All human law and custom for their sake.

“But here is tragedy ready to my hand.
“Only the glimpse of those farseeing eyes
“That, with a preternatural power, withstand
“The thing that is determined otherwise,
“Has almost automatically planned
“My symbol – the woman seeking in the skies
“Her pleasure, and the man upon the ground,
“Careless of her, who takes what she has found.”

He looked up from his reverie. Daniele
Appeared across the square. His pace was slow
And the hat that he was wont to cock so gaily
Over his brooding forehead was pulled low.
He walked as one who grappled with a daily
Trouble, his face the ideogram of woe,
As he said, like one whose whole hope has miscarried:
“Stelio, does it matter to you that she’s married?”





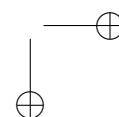
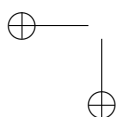


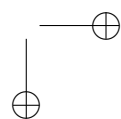
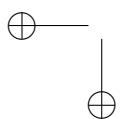
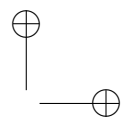
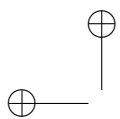
CANTO III: THE BANQUET OF THE POETS

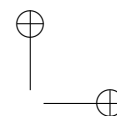
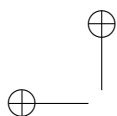
Com' è debole e misera l'anima nostra, senza difesa contro i risvegli e gli assalti di quanto men nobile e men puro dorme nella oscurità della vita inconsciente, nell' abisso inesplorato ove i ciechi sogni nascono dalle cieche sensazioni!

Un sogno pud avvelenare un' anima; un sol pensiero involontario pud corrompere una volontà.

IL PIACERE
G. d'Annunzio, 1889







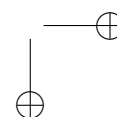
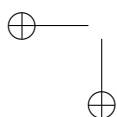
CANTO III: THE BANQUET OF THE POETS

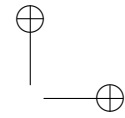
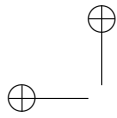
I will not flee from poetry. Sweet Art,
How I dread you, having all my life pursued
Your distant beauty that breaks the brain and heart!
I have followed you through every solitude,
Your own or mine. And when I saw you start
Up like the Phoenix from the fire renewed,
I knew, however wild the hope I shaped,
That once again your beauty had escaped.

I will not flee from poetry. High, clear,
From the unknown wilderness I hear the peal
Of a strange hunt. It ravishes my ear,
And all my senses tremble at the feel.
I am in the Wood of Fantasy, and here
Is miracle – the breaking of the seal
Set on my thought, that lay mewed up and still,
Under enchantment in a faëry hill.

Why have I been enchanted? Do I dread
The approach to the absolute risk, where I must fail
Or triumph? Was it that conflict that I fled?
And could that merely personal fear avail
To keep me voiceless, with my word unsaid,
Like the sleeping princess in the fairy-tale?
Did I shrink from the Unknown that can forbid?
No more! And God forgive me if I did!

We are on some five years, and I have a theme
Difficult for the epical beginner.
But it's an integral portion of my scheme,
Though I shall have to labor like a sinner
To touch, with many a visionary gleam,
An excellent if literary dinner,
Given in Rome, where genius loves to burn,
By an eminent editorial concern.





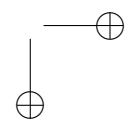
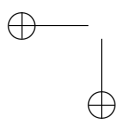
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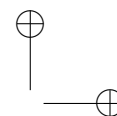
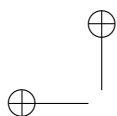
The publisher was a bustling, oily man,
Ecru-complexioned, flabby but energetic.
His quick and slippery eye appeared to scan
The world as if he had a sense prophetic
Of coming trouble, from the which he ran
Like a lizard to the cleft. The unsympathetic
Mouth like a liquorish cabbage-leaf was curved.
To rouse disgust was just what he deserved,

You felt, and felt ashamed of the disgust
Induced by his appearance. Something pleaded
In his manner, as if the creature were nonplussed
By his own squalor and dumbly interceded
For a crumb of courtesy, or the very dust
Blown off politeness, “just not to go unheeded.”
It would be difficult to sketch, in short,
A person of a more repellent sort.

Take Count Denari. Mix him with Casteroli
The music-critic. Add ambiguous shapes,
Small modern Aretines decomposing slowly,
The goats libidinous, the venereal apes,
That batten on pornography unholy.
Shake 'em together with their jests and japes,
And you've the flavor, decadent and dull,
Of Tartaruga, boisterous, – pitiful.

He gave that dinner, and had brought together
The pleiad that had written his review.
They sate there, while their curious bell-wether
Bounced up and down and shouted orders to
The waiters. He was in elevated feather,
And, as the trays came in and the corks flew,
He rose above his nature, and almost
Was not a publisher, and was a host.





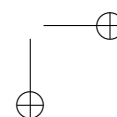
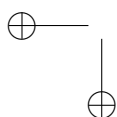
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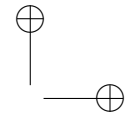
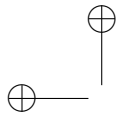
Stelio sate looking at that thick array
Of talent. He was young yet at the game,
Though in five years he had gone quite a way
Toward the odd goal of literary fame.
He still had thirst that use could not allay
For contact with his fellows. There's no name
For that queer yearning – the desire to know
Some one who may have written a book or so.

O God! What men read into men who write!
I myself have been accused of wisdom when
My mind was moving in darkness black as night.
They were not able to prove that wisdom then
Or after. But when an author heaves in sight,
Even authors think he's not like other men.
And Stelio looking on that crowd was not
Unimpressed. He thought them an unusual lot.

There sate Verducci, an Homeric peasant,
Godlike and leonine. At a glance you saw
Something that was at once divine and pleasant
As a palm-tree, simple strength commanding awe.
Life was a better thing when he was present.
Like beauty of old, surviving without flaw
In an immoderate, heterogeneous time,
He brought the gesture of the Phidian prime.

There was a poet! There, the light, the verve,
The breath of noble winds on stately heights,
The vigor of the spiritual nerve,
Grace that enchants and fancy that delights!
There were all things in him, that strengthen and preserve
Manhood in a man. Our modern catamites,
Lacking that natural and essential part
Of poetry, will perish with their art.





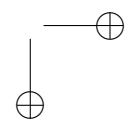
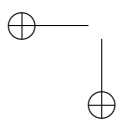
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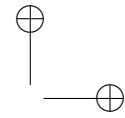
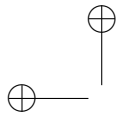
Beside him was a younger man who burned
Visibly with intenser if irregular heat.
He looked as if far figures he discerned
When the Song of Roland was shouted in the street
Of the free city, and the world's tide turned
Against King Enzo in the great defeat
By Parma, and the imperial ideal
Broke upon something baser and more real.

Those two you felt were somehow quite apart
From the others. In them were sap and blood and salt,
Elements of vivid life and living art,
Driven by energies that cannot halt.
And in coming to that gathering glib and smart
You might consider that they were at fault,
Like hounds bewildered, that have lost the scent
In a cowfield, nor know where their quarry went.

Now Chiarini was at home here, with his eyes
Of the defeated who would fain create,
And Stecchetti whom Stelio used to idolize
Long since. They hated him with perfect hate.
Chiarini had been first to patronize
Stelio. And it had been Stecchetti's fate
To be his model. The boy's success, they felt,
Was an immoderate blow below the belt.

Amid the ruck of others was one face
Familiar to us, Glauro's. He was now
One who wrote essays a bit commonplace
Or anything you pleased, on why and how
The world behaves in any given case.
There was no field he did not dare to plow,
A journalist on whom had fallen the curse
To be a specialist on the Universe.





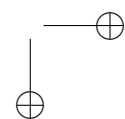
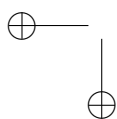
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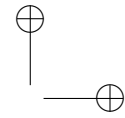
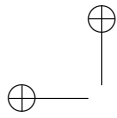
Save for the half-gods, that was the one face
That Stelio liked even with half a heart.
But there was one to hate. Mind, form, and race
From the chattering Latins set the man apart.
It was Thomas Rode who felt out of place,
And either did not care or lacked the art
To hide it. Stelio eyed him with hostility,
For Rode was a critic of ability,

A connoisseur, a man of the world, and rich.
His look was queer, like Classic Greek translated
Into German. Stelio glared, and knew not which
Of the man's idiosyncracies he hated
Most heartily. But Rode had an itch
To talk with Stelio in an elevated
Manner, which meant he fixed him with a steely
Eye, and made use of Goethecisms freely.

Not utterly a bore and good to behold,
He had that air barbaric of contempt
That makes the Southerner's hot blood run cold
With fury, when chill Nordic minds preempt
Notions of Beauty, and get some moral hold
Upon her, and, half-savage and unkempt,
Lay down the law to Italy aghast
About the splendor of her vanished past.

Perhaps his learning had defeated him,
But anyhow it made a mock of you.
Whenever he spoke, his hearer felt the dim
Effect of rays ironic filtering through
The fog of words. His lips, purpled and grim,
Suggested that, on further thought, he drew
Less favorable conclusions, as concerned
Whatever your incompetence had learned.





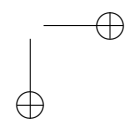
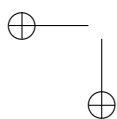
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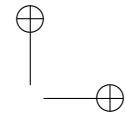
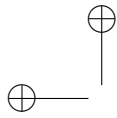
On Tartaruga his Teutonic stare
Rested in owlish mode from time to time.
He looked on him with a disgusted air
As if the man's existence were a crime.
Tartaruga seemed uneasy as the glare
Consumed him, but a party in its prime
Was just what he was made for, and he poured
Wine for the German, and roared, and smote the board.

Yet Stelio, looking on the ugly man,
Saw, as it were, beat an irregular pulse.
O'er the dull excited face strange shadows ran,
Which did not seem the natural results
Of the creature's jovial verbal rataplan.
Was he trying to conceal what might convulse
His oily countenance, unless some masking
Chatter could hide his trouble overtaking?

Rode perhaps that question understood.
Although he gave no sign of sympathy,
Something inquisitive in his brain and blood
Made him watch snakelike the toad's agony.
Stelio observed the two, and felt a flood
Of sharp distaste. What could the reason be?
Probably some dull intrigue behind the scenes,
As in all well-conducted magazines.

The wine went round. The macaroni coiled
About the forks. With prestidigitation
They made it vanish. And loose tongues well oiled
Crackled forth a general volley of conversation.
Tartaruga bellowed. What he touched he soiled,
His every utterance was the violation,
You could not say just why, of taste and truth,
Vulgar or noisy, unkindly or uncouth.





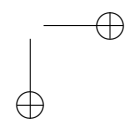
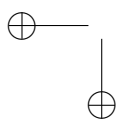
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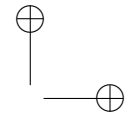
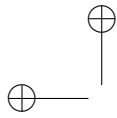
Anew I am broken by my subject, striving
Through another man's experience to perceive
A life not altogether ours, surviving
Out of a time difficult to believe.
I am too like the squalid fisher diving
Down in the green depths where the corals weave
Their ambush, whence the barracuda lunges,
And they who look for pearls find mainly sponges.

And, after days that fetched no jewel, I
Sit looking at the ocean that conceals
That wealth I dream of in my poverty,
Weary of effort, weary of the will that steels
My poor strength to continue till I die,
And weary of the weary universe that wheels
Around me, waiting to play its carrion part,
Ere the verse be ripped out of my pregnant heart.

O Verse, how you have troubled me at times!
When I consider your arbitrary laws,
Your tangle of unnecessary rhymes,
Your gangling sentence and inverted clause!
And yet your metronomic pace sublimed
Man's thinking, for no reasonable cause,
And the pulse of arsis and of thesis runs
To the rhythm of light and the metre of the suns.

What is it makes the heart cry at a verse?
The same strange heart that laughs when fat men tumble?
When politicians speak, or soldiers curse?
My powers for that enigma are too humble.
Science in vain her reasons will rehearse.
In the end the question all her arts will stumble.
Hearts beat and beat. And empires vibrate with 'em,
And always rhythm triumphs, always rhythm.





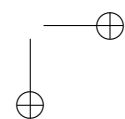
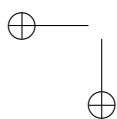
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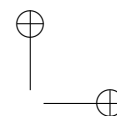
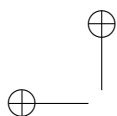
I cannot do without you. Though I wrote
The last bad line of a prosaic age,
And the ultimate lyric were stifled in my throat,
I yet should have some germ of ancient rage
Left in me, a pure fury to devote
My soul and body, that cannot disengage
Themselves, to your grim service, while I had breath,
And my dust shall pulse to music after death.

Alternately you cheat me or you wrack me.
My best thought is defeated by your whim.
This moment you have chosen to attack me,
And I must wrestle with the spirit grim,
And doubtless shall achieve merely the acme
Of unreality, the spectre dim
Of what in dream you showed me. It's too true
You only hurt them who believe in you.

O my contemporaries, the vain, vain scorn
That I have lavished on you, God knows why!
All of us strive, and are alike forlorn.
Our dreams, devices, and achievements die,
Ephemeral, for three day's struggle born,
For all our hearts are fierce or our heads high.
I cannot bear your verses. You loathe mine.
And for this grief there is no anodyne.

But I know what I did not know before,
That Master Skylark broke his heart for lines
That have no worth. I see this more and more,
Which unto pity all my heart inclines.
Will Nightingale writes balderdash to bore
Men stiff. Yet my prophetic soul divines
How, laboring with a too refractory medium,
He lost his beauty and produced our tedium.





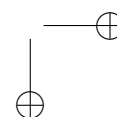
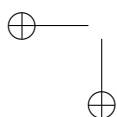
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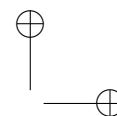
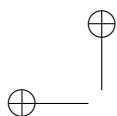
O Beauty lost! Aurora o'er the ice,
Whose wall has closed against us, where we sail
South of the Horn, seeking a Paradise
Unearthly, destined every man to fail,
Damned by our dream, and damned by our device,
And damned by our achievements. Beyond the pale
Of life we wander in the Polar glooms
Upon the sea that finally consumes.

Now what poor Tartaruga had to do
With this last outburst might not seem too clear.
Reader, if there's one trace of brain in you
You'll see that I'm creating atmosphere.
You do not like digressions? You're of the few
Who want a sharp impression to appear?
Reader, if you'd ever had a sharp impression,
You don't know how you'd relish a digression.

But, being as you are, we'll let that be.
You'll take me as I am or let me go.
I'll try, up to my best ability,
To light again my moving shadow-show.
Come, Tartaruga, in your misery.
I fear we must at length approach the woe
That raked and harrowed all your heart beneath,
While you grinned and shouted outward from the teeth.

The talk went round, the regular high-brow tripe,
The latest and most transcendental guff,
On new-found themes, but of an ancient type
Designed to show the speaker's sterling stuff,
Science, religion, music, art, the ripe
Wisdom of foyer and café, with puff
And counterpuff of epigram. Alone
Verducci sate as quiet as a stone.





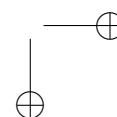
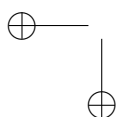
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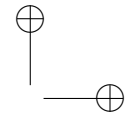
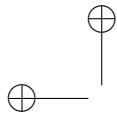
Then Glauro, in a momentary lull,
Leaned over to Stelio, holding out a slip
Of paper. Stelio, fearing another dull
Article on Italian statesmanship,
Thanked him politely, but did not feel too full
Of gratitude. He thought that friends who clip
Items from journals and hand their spoil around,
Give evidence their wits are not too sound.

“It’s the Foscarina,” Glauro said. His guess,
Which asked for little genius, had revealed
That Stelio liked his essays less and less.
But Glauro’s love against contempt was steeled.
“It’s the Foscarina. She’s had a vast success
“In Buenos Aires.” His simple eyes appealed
To Stelio, who at once with air benign
Read through a florid tribute Argentine

In queer conglomerate Spanish. On he plowed
Through many a turgid sentence epithet-choked,
Regular hokum of the critic crowd,
Which to his mind nonetheless re-evoked
Verona’s sky untroubled by a cloud,
And the Roman stage with beauty sodden and soaked.
That girl would get along, it would appear,
Without much help in either hemisphere.

“The Foscarina?” Tartaruga cried,
“By God! What actress! Oh, but have you heard?”
At once he took the story in his stride,
Delivering strokes obscene or else absurd:
“In the wrong stateroom! Her husband stood outside,
“Kicking and screaming. Coccu, in a word!
“They tell me that the whole ship heard the din.
“It didn’t matter. They didn’t let him in.”





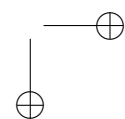
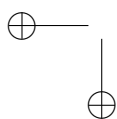
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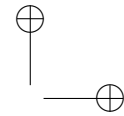
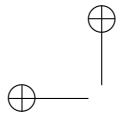
Daniele went all green. "Why the strange hue?"
Thought Stelio: "Why the devil should he care?"
"Another actor taken with his grue."
"Another wholly middle-class affair."
Glauro rose with a yell. "You hateful Jew,"
He bellowed, "You defile the generous air."
"Your whole existence from your birth was rife
"With filth. You only live to dirty life."

Tartaruga stared at him. His popping eyes,
Bistre and sad, grew suddenly forlorn
As a child's chid by a beldam. Agonies
You never would suspect him of were torn
Out of him. He wilted. The ungenerous skies
Had loosed reproach too bitter to be borne.
He drooped his ugly head. The chandeliers
Trembled at his unstudied storm of tears.

Everyone looked embarrassed, Glauro most
Of all, who by his chivalry had loosed
The storm. All felt as if they had seen a ghost
By fearsome methods, good or bad, produced.
Every man thought that he was on the coast
Of Hell, and destined for a time to roost
On the evil shore, and knew his proper baseness,
And general idiocy, and commonplaceness.

It was a moment of such wretchedness
As comes on one in desultory dreams,
Waking or sleeping, when the hateful press
Of sickly thought through the dumb spirit streams,
Increasing difficulty, making less
Resource, the while hopeless miasma teems
In marshes of the spirit. Even you
Have suffered the like spiritual "flu."





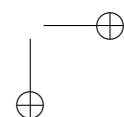
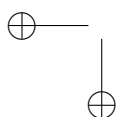
CANTO III: THE BANQUET OF THE POETS

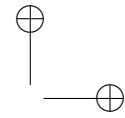
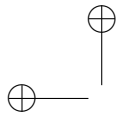
And that bright throng felt suddenly quite sick,
As I have felt, seeing my fellow vomit
At sea. He's very apt to do the trick
For you, unless you have a will indomitable to resist. That rhyme was a bit thick,
But I derived much satisfaction from it,
Although the narrative, I must admit,
At that point lost its headway quite a bit.

Stelio looked round as men look round at scenes,
At fault. Stecchetti seems pale and confused.
Chiarini's eyes ask vaguely what this means.
Rode is trying hard to look amused
At seeing a soul go all to smithereens.
Pascoli shrinks like a good child abused
By a bad teacher. How had Verducci kept
His splendid calm, while Tartaruga wept?

The door flew open. A strange man dashed in.
Tartaruga raised his melancholy head,
Staring at the newcomer. A watery grin
Puckered his mouth. And then, as if in dread,
He sprang erect. "Oh, what a fool I've been!
"Gentlemen, forgive me! Be right back," he said.
Without explaining matters any more,
He dived like lightning through the open door.

The other man went with him. The poets sat
Perplexed by the enigmatic episode,
Talking confusedly of this and that.
But no one there was able to decode
The mystery. The talk went stale and flat.
At the feast of reason too much soul had flowed,
In a loathsome way, of an unpleasant kind,
So as to upset quite their peace of mind.





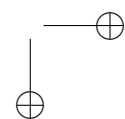
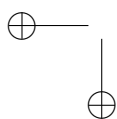
CANTO III: THE BANQUET OF THE POETS

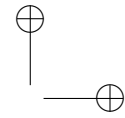
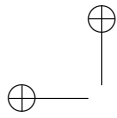
Ten minutes passed. In desultory style
They chatted. Rode made himself a bore
Not only to Stelio. With a rigid smile
He lectured them on art. Pascoli swore
Under his breath, glancing every little while,
As a man might in prison, at the door,
Which opened once more. Strange sounds met their ears.
The passage was chock-full of carabinieri.

In the midst of them stood a fantastic boy,
Beautiful as a girl. But his soft smile
Was not a thing to contemplate with joy.
He was greasy and effeminate and vile.
All this one saw at once. The hobbledehoy
Looked round the group with a glance full of guile,
Which faded into disappointment bitter.
“He’s gone,” he said in a falsetto twitter.

The room felt crammed with people. A clear cry
Suddenly rose from the restaurateur:
“He did not pay the bill. Help, or I die.
“O the bastard! O the scoundrel! O the cur.
“Pay me, Signori!” His face was all awry,
As if a high and tragic action were
In process, not an exquisitely mean,
Wretchedly comic, sordid, vulgar scene.

A voice was lifted in the hectic room.
Verducci, raising his head leonine,
Glanced sharply round. And I will not presume
To synthesize the pearls he flung the swine.
Severe and clear, his voice’s ringing boom
Echoed. Peasant simplicity divine
Suggested it would be wisdom to find out
What all the base excitement was about –





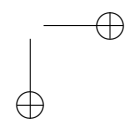
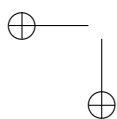
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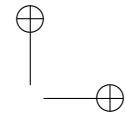
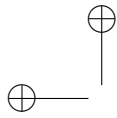
A gobbling carabineer forthwith explained.
He had warrants on three counts for the arrest
Of Tartaruga. Cheque-kiting he was pained
To state. And this boy with them had confessed
To other matters. The man, in short, was stained
With all the vices. Verducci, self-possessed
And calm as Jupiter, with mien sedate,
Replied: "I greatly fear you are too late."

Save his, through the breast of every author there
Suddenly darted a disturbing thought:
"Shall I be coupled with this louche affair?
"All Rome would cackle, if I should be caught.
"My poem! My novel! My rent!" With troubled air
And eyes full of perplexity distraught,
Each gazed around, and, catching his fellow's eye,
Glanced nervously aside, he knew not why.

Verducci seemed to fathom the anxiety
He did not feel. "My brothers, it is sad,"
He said, "Be calm. No shade of impropriety
Attaches to us, though the case is bad."
He spoke to the boy: "You have kept bad society.
"You are a pitiable sight, my lad.
"Go now!" (His voice grew thunderously gruff)
"You'll have to suffer. It will be enough."

The catamite, with a bridle and a leer,
Departed with the mystified police, –
Balked of their prey. Again arose the clear
Cry of the restaurant-man, that would not cease.
They paid him, and he grinned from ear to ear.
Rode strove to launch another masterpiece
Of critical comment. Verducci's lion head
Drooped heavily. "It's time to go," he said.





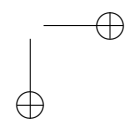
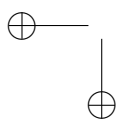
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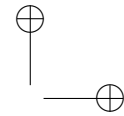
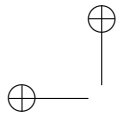
Out in the street, in the nocturnal air,
Stelio felt queerly desolate and chill.
Tartaruga! – He was finished. What an affair!
Hiding, ruined, rotten, a prey to every ill!
The past disgrace, the future but despair,
In a world where all the trumpets of ill-will
Were blowing. A foul etching seemed to rust
Into his soul with the acid of disgust.

“Walk home with me,” Verducci said. He saw
With simple penetration the dismay
Of the younger man at the disgusting, raw
Touch of reality. They went their way
Through lamplit streets, where brooded yet the awe
And splendor of imperial decay.
They reached his house and sate down in the gloom
Of the small, whitewashed, fire-lit sitting-room.

“Horrible business,” said the older man,
“Tartaruga’s done for. Do not judge him hard.
“This life consists of things that no one can
“Elucidate. Tartaruga was ill-starred.
“He served me well. I’m not the man to scan
“His imperfections. Nor shall I discard
“Gratitude. He may eat his meal with me,
“Poor devil! for his former charity.

“If you’re troubled by this business, so am I.
“It’s hard to look into abysmal deeps
“Of personal vileness, and see the nether sky
“Of Hell that under us in darkness sweeps.
“Your ventures are before you. You look high.
“It’s well to see how the hidden serpent sleeps
“Beneath our lives. You’re a poet, it is true.
“The sight might make a poet out of you.





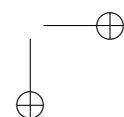
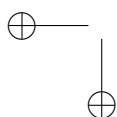
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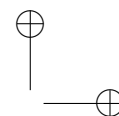
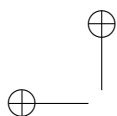
“Not just by shallow feeling sentimental,
“That estimating falsely will intrude
“Into the heart, but sympathy deep and gentle
“That is a part of all heroic mood,
“No ephemeral impulse merely accidental,
“But the thought, permanent, vigorous, and good,
“That’s not forgotten when the morning light
“Lays silly ghosts that scared us in the night.

“This thing had its spectacular side. Don’t think
“Whatever picturesque melodramatic
“Element was in it was the fatal link.
“That was the merest stroke of chance erratic.
“What hemlock Tartaruga has to drink!
“His inner agony provides the ecstatic
“Horror, where he hides now, unclean, alone
“Staring at the future’s waste of sand and stone.

“There is the Aeschylean thing beneath.
“That’s for the poet. The raw episode
“Is but the vulgar and material sheath,
“Wherein the fabulous sword of thought’s bestowed.
“There is a truth to throw into the teeth
“Of appearance, a passion that shakes off the load
“Incoherent of events. There one may find;
“Eternal pity, and love that is not blind.”

He ceased. The boy felt what he always felt
At every crisis, the strange, fatal, cold,
Analytic sense of things, that cannot melt
Or flower, like the rash passions that unfold
In men who have no art, and do not smelt
With ignis fatuus their fairy gold.
‘Platitudes about wretches in the mire!
‘They might be fuel for Verducci’s fire.



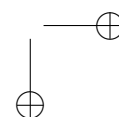
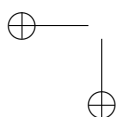


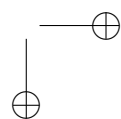
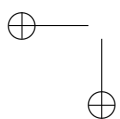
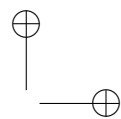
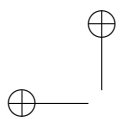
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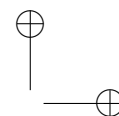
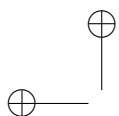
‘What’s that to me? – to me who undertake
‘The great and the perpetual? Who have a vision
‘That’s not concerned with any petty stake.
‘I have made my choice. I have come to my decision.
‘I have foreseen the splendor I shall make.
‘What else subsists merits but my derision.
‘And the poet! The poet shall invite his soul,
‘Crowned and triumphant in the Capitol.’

Something withdrew in him, as if he shrank
Into another self and so passed by
A cup from which perhaps his elder drank,
A grail of more than human sympathy.
Men are so different. Meanwhile he would thank
The Gods for seeing with a clearer eye.
In graceful words of superexquisite ice
He expressed gratitude for good advice,

Rose, and departed. The red dawn was breaking
Over the immemorial city. The flare
Smote the wild domes and towers. A breeze came, slaking
His hot brow. He inhaled the chastened air
Of morning. Some enormous undertaking
Seemed to be working in him – an affair
Beyond Verducci. “A moral man, subdued
“By years,” he thought, “sentimental, timid, crude!”







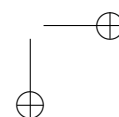
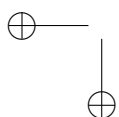
CANTO IV: TROVATA

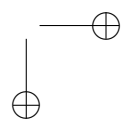
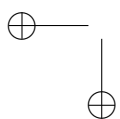
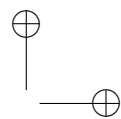
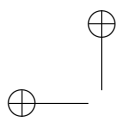
- Che vedi? – gli chiese Piero Martello chinandosi anch' egli sul margine consunto dalle funi delle secchie secolari.
- Il volto della Verita – rispose il maestro.

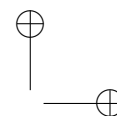
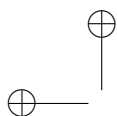
IL FUOCO
G. d'Annunzio, 1898

- O perdonatemi! perdonatemi! –

(La Foscarina to Stelio Éffrena)
IDEM







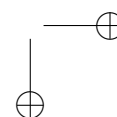
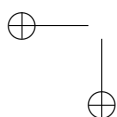
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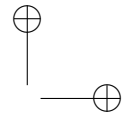
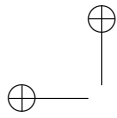
Life had grown good to Stelio in a way.
Whether before or after twenty-eight
It's good to be famous, and have enough to pay
One's debts, which have a trick of growing great.
With here a novel and with there a play,
Stelio attained this comfortable state.
He was young and vivid. It's not hard to pass
For a genius – with the educated class,

Especially with women. If you tell
Tales to a lady who's bored with what she deems
Existence, treat her naive opinions well,
Detect in her unstudied speech bright gleams
Of parts, you're apt to make her bosom swell
With pleasure, and her spirit with vain dreams.
It may be fun. It may be merely tact,
But there is trouble latent in the act.

Stelio was a sort of bird of Paradise
To a dozen Roman ladies, married all.
Their lords were Roman nobles with dull eyes
And duller lips, who lived the strange and small
Life of their class. In the unchanging skies
They dwelt unchanging. And if one chanced to fall
Out of heaven, no one noticed that the void
Was poorer by a missing asteroid.

Unsatisfying and unsatisfied,
Life, if it could be called so, dragged along.
There were cards and routes and races, misapplied
Effort to amuse existences gone wrong.
Besieged by boredom, all device they tried.
But still ennui o'ertowered the beleaguered throng.
Not even the erotical intriguer
Can longer than a moment break that leaguer.





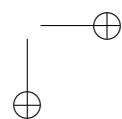
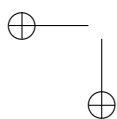
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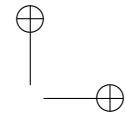
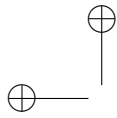
Not one of them had seen or felt or known
Anything to die for or to fight about,
Except prestige, when popular breath had blown
On some one's honor, putting into doubt
Courage or chastity, when it's fair to own
Flashes of actual temper would burst out.
These ended with a flesh-wound in the wrist,
After which the two desperadoes kissed.

From '87 to 1892
Stelio had seven mistresses, every one
Of noble birth. I won't recount to you
Those histories. An affair was always fun.
Questions would rise, though: Could one put it through?
How to get out of it, when it was done?
But Stelio was sufficiently adroit
To issue from an amorous exploit

With credit which would count in the next venture.
Elena Muti knew it to her cost.
Donna Maria Ferres scaped all censure
By timely death. The soul that she had lost
Returned to God, according to an indenture
Previously signed. All Stelio's loves star-crossed,
Whether they were venereal or aetherial,
Provided him with excellent material.

He used to wonder, clasped in those white arms,
In the very sanctuary of the embrace,
What the woman thought of. Tickled by sensual charms,
He yet could study the ecstatic face
Of the victim liberated from dull alarms
Of her existence meanly commonplace,
Divinely and supinely unaware
That hers was passion that he did not share.





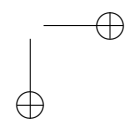
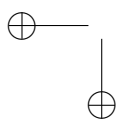
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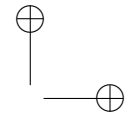
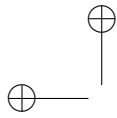
Always he saw himself apart, aloof
From that visible emotion. Was it real?
Did that throbbing creature furnish any proof
Of anything? Was she touching some ideal?
As lonely as a sparrow on the roof,
He studied raptures extra-hymeneal,
Wondering why on earth the spirit melts
When some one's been in bed with some one else.

His didn't. Yet how often he had tried
To teach a woman something, make her be
Mystery unpredictable, secret, undescried,
Power that could minister to necessity
Like his, that could burn his soul with a hot tide
That was not just glandular. He could never see
Why they couldn't or they wouldn't. What they gave
He could not give them back, which left him slave

To the part of him that took, nor seemed to want
What they surrendered. He could not escape
Becoming, as it were, the hierophant
Of a mock Eros whose ritual was a jape.
Illusion danced before him, to enchant
His spirit, and she always took the shape
Of some poor creature of sublime banality,
Who when possessed was one more unreality.

All anodynes and medicines he tried
Against that coldness, and from Pole to Pole
Wandered like the fiend, endeavoring to provide
His remedy. He dived in his own soul
Deep as e'er plummet sounded, and descried
The life unknown which is always in control
Of what is visible, and by influence strange,
By dreaming, makes the will flow into change





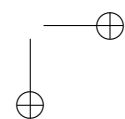
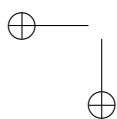
CANTO IV: TROVATA

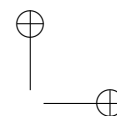
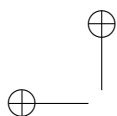
He grew a master of self-exploration,
Which holds adventurous charm and some small danger.
In the dim witch-wood of imagination
There's much of interest to the forest-ranger,
Who brings his concentrated observation
To bear upon phenomena much stranger
Than all the deserts vast and antres idle,
Haunted by anthropophagi homicidal.

Dread images rise darkly by those ways.
Phantoms too awfully actual come to be.
There was nothing. They create themselves. A blaze
Of grisly light glares out, whereby we see
Things that have worked within us all our days,
Never suspecting the malignity
And beauty there, the energy divine,
And the passion, savage, traitorous, serpentine.

I have looked on that red country, a landscape vast
As Jupiter's horizons, where I saw
Enormous shadows moving. As they passed
I sought to envisage them, despite the awe
That girt them. And their mystery at last
Had meaning, though I could not learn the law
That governs the microcosm that is I –
Result of fifty billion years gone by,

Plowed out of starshine by divinest force
Unreckoned. At the end of all I stand,
Prey to small fear or imbecile remorse,
Like me the product of the unresting hand
Working at infinity's verge, without recourse
Or remedy. I have wandered in that land
That lies at the far limit of our thought,
And seen how futile was the thing I wrought.





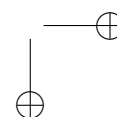
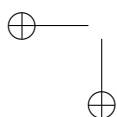
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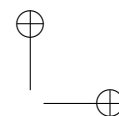
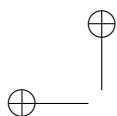
Look but on that red country. There the pulse
Beats of tremendous stars living and dead,
Whose gleaming rhythm lightens or occults
What is to come, or what's already fled
Into the limbo of achieved results, –
Astronomy that baffles any head.
Baffling though it be, at least to come in touch
With reality beyond us, that is much.

Stelio was mad to know himself, though why
One well might ask. Within was there some gem
Deep in abysses, shining like an eye
Light-generating, for the diadem
Of the spirit? Could one drag it up on high
Out of one's deeps? Or did the Fates condemn
A man to struggle vainly for the jewel,
Drowned in that sea of self for ever cruel?

Yon reef awash, we have seen its teeth before,
But the depths beyond, they call for breath and nerve.
Go down in them, you pass beyond the roar
Of superficial surf. Wild currents swerve
Downward and outward from the familiar shore.
Courage is very well, but will not serve
Alone. Where the wild eddies curl and swirl,
Are you firm in the belief there is a pearl?

Over his manuscripts he grew aware
Of lonely beauty that came not on the page
Where the pen skittered. The image sharp and fair,
The coined thought that was his nature's gage,
By-product of a thing that was not there,
Made him feel like a beast caught in the cage
Of fancy, or hunting the cold trail of a dream,
Or struggling with an inexorable stream





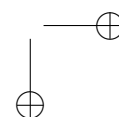
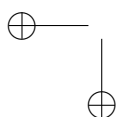
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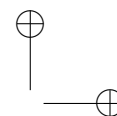
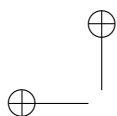
Coming roaring down from a source he yearned to know.
The salmon, leaping up the cataract
With spring's unbelievable force, is baffled so,
As he feels a savage power draw and attract,
That fetched him from Bermuda's deep to go
Headlong against the stream, there to enact
His tragedy to the utterance, hurling and lunging
Up through wild waters battering and plunging.

Divinest discontent! There was energy
Let loose in him, that he conceived and knew.
And the pen in his hand could lighten poetry.
Beyond there was the phantom that withdrew.
He looked on many a sunrise wearily.
The breath of the young morning, trembling through
Mimosa bloom, murmured, "Not there! Not there!"
"You have lost it. Otherwhere! Otherwhere! Otherwhere!" –

Glauro was aware of trouble. One divines
Quickly that he grieves, who is close to one's own heart,
Though he cannot tell the thing for which he pines.
Glauro was canvassing theories of Art,
German, and Nietzsche, all three ominous signs.
Just notions he endeavored to impart
To Stelio, who, though utterly obsessed
By the impossible passion in his breast,

Could read the neurotic's fierce philosophy
That is so penetrating and so false.
Nietzsche for him was an epiphany,
Although the demiurge that he exalts
Is the sick shadow of infirmity
Cast upward on the mind's cathedral vaults,
Whose altar of its candlesticks is stripped,
While the only light comes guttering from the crypt.





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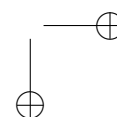
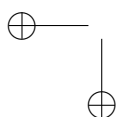
But Stelio scented poetry and power
And odd prevision of what's to be, forerunning
By many a century the appointed hour,
Great aperçus and intuitions stunning,
And a novel dialectic born to flower
Against accepted things, heroic cunning
Transcending all, even beauty. Like a flare
It enlightened him – Otherwhere! – Otherwhere!

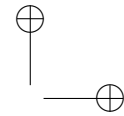
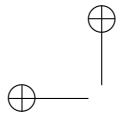
Nothing is stranger than how purest thought
Leads half inevitably to impure act.
Abelard and Eloisa surely ought
To be, if proof must be, proof of the fact.
The German undersize and overwrought,
One quarter genius and three quarters cracked,
Made men like Stelio, as they put it, think.
You get the same effect from too much drink.

Stelio in no time was in Paradise.
The half-baked notions that were dear to him
Had found the master who could synthesize
Their egotism and incoherence dim.
The ideas overwrought and undersize,
Fantasy alloyed with philosophic whim,
Possessed him. The months passed, and he grew ripe
To be a superhuman supertype.

.

The Solari palace is a large affair
Like many another plaster wedding-cake.
There are ten sham Rafaels, but don't say so there,
And Guido Renis, also chiefly fake.
The baroque façade has an immoral air.
For centuries every duke has been a rake,
And every duchess, though we may deplore
The fact has been a thorough-going – bore.





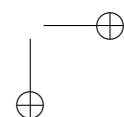
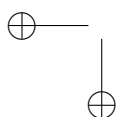
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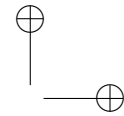
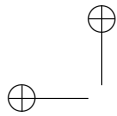
And the then duchess was thus constituted.
Her life was one libidinous eccentricity.
Her lord and duke, it was currently reputed,
Was cynically guilty of complicity,
A rumor that in time will be refuted.
Like better men he merely loathed publicity,
And dreading her intrigues and camarillas,
He fled to Africa and shot gorillas.

Thence he would send her undesirable gifts,
Panthers which she kept in the conservatory,
(They looked exotic in the rosy drifts
Of petals, an elegant memento mori)
And lowbrowed apes, full of malignant shifts
And loathsome wiles. But the cobras were her glory.
They were less deadly than she was, when they kissed.
Their fangs were drawn by an anatomist.

Stelio first met her one soft afternoon
At tea. The mild repast had just been spread
When the Countess Qualchecosa fell in a swoon,
As a bushmaster raised its hateful head.
The Count Denari turned pearl-grey and soon
Departed. It's reported that he said:
"One cannot tell which part of her is maddest,
"Whether the sadist or the nature-faddist."

But Stelio fled not, though now and then a moan
Came from a boudoir and whiffs of sal volatile,
Where the countess was being poulticed with cologne
And coming to. The duchess prattled chattily.
Her huge eyes seemed to drink him. And her tone
Allured him as she coiled a cobra nattily
About her forearm. Stelio felt quite sure
That this was going to be a grand amour.





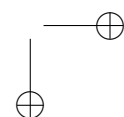
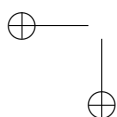
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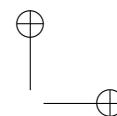
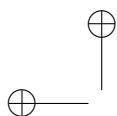
Life certainly was brilliant and bizarre
For several zoological months. He fell
In line completely with her particular
Humor, and she exercised a certain spell.
Whether Stelio or a new-bought Jaguar
Were dearer to her might be hard to tell.
With either she was happy. I won't waste
More words, describing her Circëan taste.

She naturally gave him what she had,
Which he might have purchased at a cheaper price
From other women who were quite as bad,
And from any human standpoint quite as nice.
But he was tickled by her exotic fad,
And rather wallowed in neurotic vice,
While she supposed the powers of her mind
Were what attracted him, for lust is blind.

But she liked figuring in verse which stated
That she would not have found Adonis cold
The morning of the boar-hunt, electroplated
Poetry that is now so pale and old,
And overdrawn and underbred and dated.
O God, to think how once the stuff was gold
Molten by the poet's passion! Surely it ran
Hot enough once! What a piece of work is man!

He came one evening with the dame to sup.
They sate 'mid orchids while the monkeys screamed
At the fangless cobras. They crowned cup on cup
With sweet white wine. Suddenly all things seemed
To lose their values. Strange disgust welled up
Against her as the frothy Asti creamed
O'er the goblet. Her cheap folly made him puke.
He rose. There in the doorway stood the duke,





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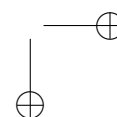
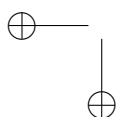
Returned from Africa. That was a scene.
The duke was not disposed to take things well,
But carried it off with superdual mien.
The duchess's emotions, who can tell?
Stelio departed with a sense unclear
Of being caught at it. Broken all the spell.
Men never will do justice, that is flat,
To girls who let them in for things like that.

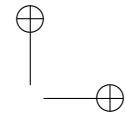
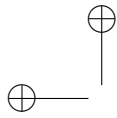
There had to be a duel. The duke was all
For the utterance, revolvers and what not.
But Stelio's second, who was practical,
Said he'd be damned if his principal got shot.
They settled upon sabres. The chance is small
That anybody will be hurt a lot,
If the point's barred. And there will be no dead,
If strokes are not permitted at the head.

They met in the cold dawn upon those terms.
The duke was really angry. He believed
Stelio was just the food for angleworms,
And his ambition nearly was achieved.
The blades were sterilized. Millions of germs
Died in the alcohol flame. They clove and cleaved.
And the duke, who naturally was seeing red,
Played false, and smote poor Stelio on the head.

He was out much plastered in a week or two.
The duke was nice about it, I must say,
And to his favorite Africa withdrew,
Leaving Stelio quite a hero in a way.
The duchess disappeared from human view
For several years. She lives yet in decay
In Florence. Her menagerie went to pieces,
And is represented now by Pekineses.*

*The author expressly denies any connection between the heroine
of this episode and a living lady, who had an interest in dangerous





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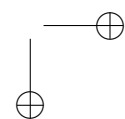
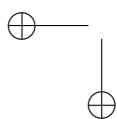
About this trivial matter I have made
What vulgar fun I had the skill to make.
Stelio, at the end of the blank escapade,
Was sensible of blunder and mistake,
Which hurts. Solari's coup de Jarnac blade
Perhaps had brought new impulses awake.
Divine desire of solitude came o'er him.
He went to Pisa, as Byron went before him,

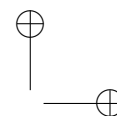
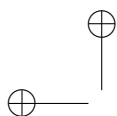
And wandered in the pinewood all day long,
Meditating beauty, and drinking beauty in
From the white Carraras, while an inward song
Formed in him, first a cry far off and thin,
Then images in a resplendent throng,
Moving vehemently on, as if to win
A passage into the visible. Day by day
He found how hard it is to break that way.

Great words were at his lips, Delphic and fierce.
Painfully he strove to choose them and combine,
So that the hidden thought at length might pierce
The integument, and in full glory shine.
And then light perished in the universe,
And darkness swallowed the human and divine.
The bright creation vanished like a vision,
Leaving him his interior derision

And a bitter craving for the o'ermastering theme
That should possess his whole potentiality,
That should make reality a splendid dream,
And give a splendid dream splendid reality.
Oh, to be drowned in the torrential stream
Of his own thought, purged of all triviality,
Bearing men and things before it, the intense
Essence of beauty and intelligence!

animals and some acquaintance with the principal figure in this poem. He knows nothing of the lady or her tigers and utterly disclaims the least intention of innuendo as toward her.





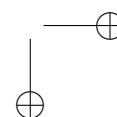
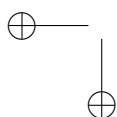
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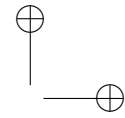
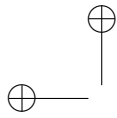
To be, my God, to be the wild expression
Of what he felt and with such clearness saw!
Not to be stifled by routine progression
Of things, nor conscious of this inner flaw,
This emptiness of a time and a profession,
Nor bound by the inexorable law
Which throws our high ambitions out of court.
It reads: No pint-pot can contain a quart.

What is a poet? – A person with a sense
Of life apart from life, something bright, dear,
Existing in delightful immanence
In all things, an interior atmosphere
That can be felt in persons or events.
A poet is a man who makes this clear,
Connecting inner beauty, that shoots through
His universe, with the hearts of me and you.

He knew this just as well as you or I,
Or better than you or I could ever do.
And yet a pregnant cloud blotted the sky
Of the pure thought, which could not filter through
Things that were low were mingled with the high.
Horrors were in him that he only knew.
They raised a barrier fatal and malign
Against the beauty and the dream divine.

And he grew weary of the Pisan wood,
In the sweet mornings and the delicate air,
Baffled by matters no one understood,
Whose explication he could not forbear
And he was listless in the solitude,
Suffering the immobility of despair.
The mountains mocked him. But it was a shock
To find they had a perfect right to mock.





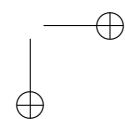
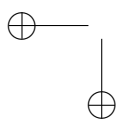
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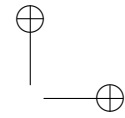
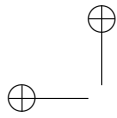
What was he writing? No doubt the Argive Plain
Gleamed in the inner sunlight of the mind,
Yet the play lay dead in the cold womb of the brain.
The shadowy tragedy that lurked behind
Grew dimmer. What worth the splendid mise-en-scene,
If to dream-figures he continued blind?
The imagined creatures tarried, or withdrew
To their own regions. They so often do.

Miserable Poets! We see our puppets clear
Rarely – as Shakespeare saw Falstaff past doubt,
Or as Dickens saw divinest Gamp appear,
Rubbing on the fender-brass her female snout.
Aye, poets, with all music in the ear,
Know, O how sadly, they have not brought out
The beauty or the irony, which fancy
Displayed to them with her false necromancy.

Vainly he sought to distinguish and define
Elements that stifled the creative will,
Wandering in his own soul as in a mine,
Where all was dark, distant from men, and still.
Treasure must be there, and he could not resign
Unrecompensed research. Self-mockery shrill
Said, sneering: “Thought is seldom what it seems,
“And yours is but the scum of damned dim dreams.”

“Is there nobody to give me what I need?”
The vulgar question formed in his checked mind,
As it might in any beggar’s who must plead
For daily bread with careless humankind.
Some other brain, might it foster the strange seed
He lacked, other eyes see where his were blind?
If he had the talent, the desire, the flair,
Then why was the reality not there?





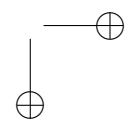
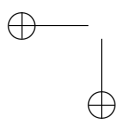
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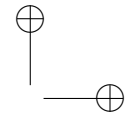
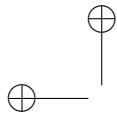
How all of us, inexpert in the soul,
Struggle with our dilemmas and overreach
Ourselves, and hourly pay a triple toll
For knowledge only bitter time can teach.
Day after day he watched the long waves roll
Their clashing glory up the Tyrrhenian beach,
Echoing the mystery of the crags inland,
Whose beauty none of us can understand.

The verses coiled like serpents from his pen.
They seemed to him foreign, perilous, and strange,
Like utterance of an unknown race of men.
In full creation, a detestable change
Came over the melodious phrases when
He set them down. They had lost the height and range
He hoped for, seeming but synthetic dyes,
Broken wings of artificial butterflies.

For a month or more he dwelt at Pisa, moping
In a disastrous and unhappy way,
Until one evening when the sun was sloping
Down the steep crags of the declining day,
And he wandered meditating, fearing, hoping,
Unhappy by the sun-trampled, burning spray
Where he went to gnaw his inner trouble daily,
To him across the sands appeared Daniele.

He was glad to see Daniele, even if
He was a bore. There had to be escape
From the frustration that stopped him like a cliff.
At least Daniele was a human shape,
However mentally limited and stiff.
He had been kind in many another scrape,
Kindness which Stelio, knowingly or blindly,
Had of late years accepted not too kindly.





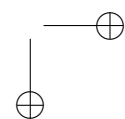
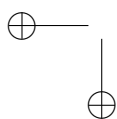
CANTO IV: TROVATA

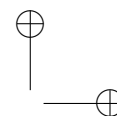
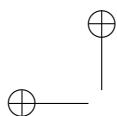
But here he was once more with his old way
That could not hide affection, nor required
Consideration, equal return, or pay
Of flattery. The one thing he desired,
He thought, was Stelio's glory since that day
When his prophetic spirit had been fired
By his friend's verses. Hack-writing dilettante,
He wished another man to be a Dante,

And took his measures solemnly to that end.
He studied Stelio, thought, worried and dreamed,
His difficulties sought to comprehend,
Worked up a clique, wrote articles, and schemed
New worlds for him. He seemed the perfect friend,
And was in fact precisely what he seemed.
But his affection did have this objection:
No one likes being hounded to perfection.

Stelio could see he was big with something now,
But knew too much about him to be curious.
They supped. Daniele, with unclouded brow,
Talked politics and poetry fast and furious.
He managed to insinuate somehow
Exile in Pisa was a thing injurious.
He said: "I know you have a real abhorrence
"Of Rome. Why don't you come to us in Florence?

"Of course, we are provincial but you'll find,
"In spite of that, people you'll understand
"Who'll understand, and contact with the mind
"Of Europe." – The sotto voice, underhand
Thing they call mind of Europe! It's behind
Most of the bunkum in our nomansland
Of intellect. Stelio was not aware
Of this, but listened with a courteous air.





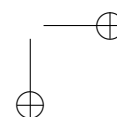
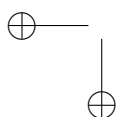
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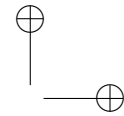
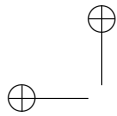
Daniele went right on, though what he said,
Interpreted, meant just: "Come and be flattered.
"We'll set a crown of laurel on your head.
"We'll cut our cloth for you, however tattered."
Stelio was sick of his interior dread.
He would even go to Florence, as if it mattered
What one did anyhow! And, O God, how sweet
Is praise that plasters you after defeat!

So next day, third-class, solemnly they jolted
To Florence, while, oblivious, Arno ran.
Joyful, Daniele in the compartment bolted
Philosophic notions to the very bran,
While Stelio brooded silent and revolted
By the man's inhumanity to man,
And deeply vowing, never, never, never,
To think another man of letters clever.

They reached the town. Above the ghastly station
Santa Maria Novella's exquisite tower
Spired over all mundane consideration,
A quiet symbol of unquiet power.
Evening, as sweet as pleasant contemplation,
Descended, the dear swallow-haunted hour.
He was glad he'd come. There was something like release
In the soft twilight, a hint, a scent of peace.

Daniele took him, as he always did,
To a dilapidated small café,
Discoursing still on various matters hid
From the vulgar, in his inimitable way.
Into the monologue this word he slid:
"Stelio, I have got tickets for the play."
Thither they went after a filling dinner,
And found a box that was rather upper than inner.





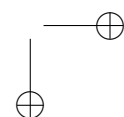
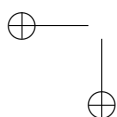
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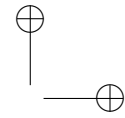
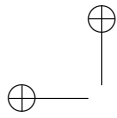
Italy's a shrine of art. Why is it then
Their theatres are such revolting holes,
That quite defeat the realistic pen,
And drive a shudder through barbaric souls?
And also, in the name of gods and men,
What hideous power the repertoire controls,
That makes them play chef d'oeuvres of that noodle
Whose works the wise were wont to call Sardoodle?

Coups de théâtre are easily arranged.
I have myself arranged them in my way.
Tricked by the setting, our spirits have exchanged
Reality for the factitious play.
When we're from truth sufficiently estranged,
The blow's delivered, whether grave or gay.
Stelio, sitting in the dark sad and uncertain,
Suspected nothing, when up went the curtain.

He had been too bored with Glauro to have read
The play's name, or observe the flaring poster
Under the streetlamps. Things were in his head
That barred consideration of the roster
Of small-town actors. But some prescience dread
Possessed him. Destiny's wild roller-coaster
Gained impetus. A thrill raced through his blood.
In the foot-lights' blaze the Foscarina stood.

That voice lit up the world. The attitude
Was music in the jangling noise of things.
Creative tenderness came there to brood
Over his void with overshadowing wings.
He gave up understanding. He understood,
Quivering with beauty, like instrumental strings
Stricken with harmony. Attitude and voice
Smote him like weapons, leaving him no choice.





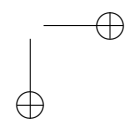
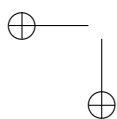
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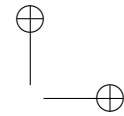
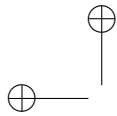
I hinted that the play was by Sardou.
On second thought, I fear, it was Dumas
Fils, and an object hardly of vertu,
Most probably “La Dame aux Camélias,”
A dull affair, uninteresting, untrue,
A piffling piece of unimpressive blah,
Transmogrified into intensive fire
By an actress who was diamond entire,

Clear, without fault, who to the author lent
Everything he’d excluded from the piece,
Passion volcanoes lack the force to vent,
Beauty whole literatures could not release.
Stelio felt sick and weak and impotent.
And then the wave, the swell, the fierce increase
Of energy came back, the returning tide.
His own idea was revived.

For once in his life, perhaps the only time,
He had escaped from his queer envelope
Of conscious sense aware of pantomime
Played by himself, seeking no more to cope
With his environment comic or sublime.
Glauro beside him stared. Beyond his hope
This yeast was working. As many a time before
And after echoed the mob’s multiple roar,

When the play ended. All that Stelio saw
Was a theatrical prismatic flare
Of light, and all perfection without flaw
In the hot focus of the central glare.
Out of the crowd they managed to withdraw,
And stumbled down a shadowy steep stair
Into that ugly world that through the ages
Remains the same, the world behind all stages.





CANTO IV: TROVATA

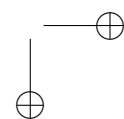
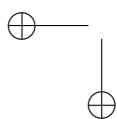
She was there! She was there! Stage-hands were all around,
Pulling and hauling with many a Latin oath.
Dantesque light gloomed. There was movement, there was
sound.

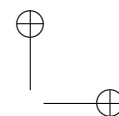
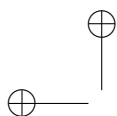
Glauro saw them meet, and the queer look of both.
Her face was passionate still with a profound
Emotion. Glauro turned like a man loth
To see. Backdrops flew up with clankings screechy,
As he heard Stelio cry: "O grand' amatrice!"
.

On that same height where seventeen years before
Sate Stelio, another lad of seventeen
Sate now, perched high o'er Adria's silvery floor.
Do you remember a domestic scene
Stelio had witnessed through the druggist's door?
The baby had thriven in the years between.
He was blackavized, with a slow latent flame
In his eye-balls. Pio Speranza was his name.

Upon his knees a book lay open, which
From time to time he dipped in, the very same
Verses that Stelio once had found so rich
In beauty, and then productive of such shame.
But Pio's heavy lips for joy would twitch
As he re-read them, and the inner flame
Lightened in his eyes as he pondered, dark and grave,
On "Skies of cobalt and the enchanted wave,"

And on "the song that dances, and fights back,
"And trembles, tamed, under a strong man's hand."
For him the lines supplied some native lack.
There was force in them he could not understand,
That moved him fiercely. He knew he had no knack
For the creative, no muse at his command,
That he was quite an ordinary boy,
Normally gifted to suffer and enjoy.



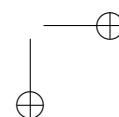
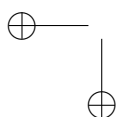


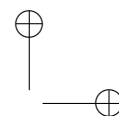
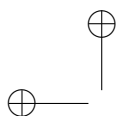
CANTO IV: TROVATA

This gave him some victorious sense. When eve
Let fall her purple on the glooming heath,
Of the transcendent heights he took his leave,
And sought Trascara glimmering beneath.
He felt that curious triumph they achieve,
Who know reality and seek no wreath
Beyond them. Darkness came. He stopped before
The orange light at the Post-office door,

And went within. The man behind the grille
Thrust out two letters, one in his proper fist,
The other unknown. He knew things had gone ill
With his first essay as an essayist.
The editor had not read it, and none will.
“Éffrena the Abruzzian Novelist,”
He had called it. He had sent it. It was back.
The latent fire in the dark eyes burned black.

The other letter was a form polite,
That thanked him for his interest with much grace,
The sort of thing all writers have to write,
Elegant, noncommittal, commonplace.
His sombre eyes were suddenly alight.
A flush of happiness drove o’er his face.
At the page’s foot, dazzling to mortal view,
Stood “Stelio Éffrena” and a curlicue.





CANTO V: FIRE

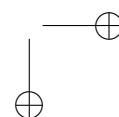
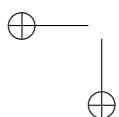
Πυρ καὶ Θάλασσα, καὶ τὰ πῖστ ἐδειξάτην
φθείροντε τὸν δύστηνον. . .

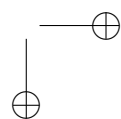
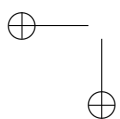
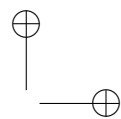
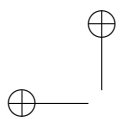
AGAMEMNON
Aeschylus

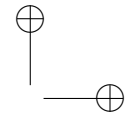
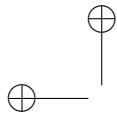
A Francesca da Rimini,
Niminy-Piminy,
Je ne sais quoi young man.

PATIENCE
W. S. Gilbert

Duncan is in *her* grave.
After life's fitful fever *she* sleeps well.







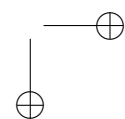
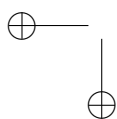
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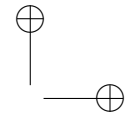
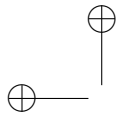
Thronging phantasms that would recreate
That curious past are hovering as I write,
Some that discover the progress of this fate,
And some that come merely to darken sight.
I sit in Florence doomed to meditate
Their meaning, and to bring what's hid to light –
After my fashion, which is but my fashion,
And to mingle, if I may, mirth and compassion,

Though the mirth's dying. It grows hard to laugh,
Though the heart's shield be brass triply embossed,
When we consider the strange cenotaph
Stelio erected to great beauty lost.
The cup is empty that we thought to quaff.
The flower has drooped before the unfeeling frost.
Where the flame reared its ever-changing spire,
Who now shall kindle such another fire.

I have explored that work where is explored
A trouble which is hard to comprehend.
Everything that I ever have abhorred
Is in it, nay fills the book from end to end.
The golden bowl is broken, the silver cord
Loosed. Love is cheated. Treason to the friend
Follows, and yet you read on, fascinated
As though you were seeing murder consummated.

The Foscarina never found a play
To her purpose. Stelio never found a theme
To his. Mezzo cammin upon their way
They met for the moment of ecstatic dream,
And made due sacrifice to mortal clay,
And found that it was mortal, it would seem,
Continuing always, as it had been fated,
To miss their goals while they collaborated.





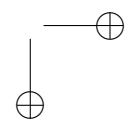
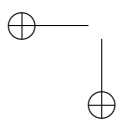
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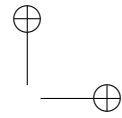
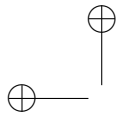
Yet when they met, what glorious young-eyed hope
Possessed and ruled them! In what atmosphere
Of light they lived! while the poor world must grope
Darkly where they beheld all things grow clear
And beautiful in clarity. Their scope
Seemed strangely widened. Stelio saw appear
At length dream-creatures glimmering with awe
Of the creation. Or was it that he saw

Her moving in that region? The millstone play
About his neck at Pisa, that derelict
Vision that had been his trouble night and day,
Suddenly ceased to hamper and constrict.
Had he run down the spiritual prey?
The trap he set for fantasy, had it clicked?
Was he seeing, with the woman's sight of things
Invisible, his pageantry of kings?

Had she renewed him and performed her function?
The play came into being with a rush,
Though evil stars towered o'er it in conjunction,
And dawn above it glared with a hectic flush.
He took her offered gift without compunction,
Paying her back with a fantastic gush
Of sentiment that had no force behind.
She knew why in the play he made her blind.

For the desperate ecstasy of the embrace
Could not deceive her. All that springtime through,
While the cherry-bloom was like a deed of grace
She suffered what she inevitably knew.
The passion that made Heaven of her face
Intoxicated him, which was his due
Doubtless. Despairing she gave herself the more
A sacrifice to the wild Minotaur





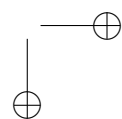
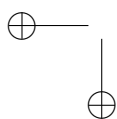
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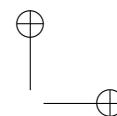
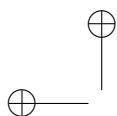
Of sexuality to no end, and sank
In her own sight. She saw no grandeur loom
Out of their union, but only something blank
And animal and mirthless with a doom
Writ clear upon it. A dreadful cup she drank
In the villa, looking o'er the cherry-bloom
Towards Florence, when the passionate nights were done
And the town lay glamorous in the morning sun.

Oh, there were triumphing moments. They passed by.
She felt it was true power that she gave.
What did he give her? Sensuality,
Which governs much on this side of the grave.
She had given splendor soon condemned to die
And could not have what she was born to crave.
Intact in spirit and sublimely tender,
She steeled herself before the perishing splendor.

Aye, there were moments! When she at last conveyed
All beauty to his poem, and every tier
Of the theatre was silent and afraid,
As she created hideous fate and fear
Out of his pre-historic harlequinade,
A terror that was doomed to disappear
If you read it. She knew that sadly. And she knew
What sort of schism was rising 'twixt the two.

Perhaps the very loveliness she poured
From her abundance somehow injured him.
He had striven and striven and this was his reward,
To have another illustrate the dim
Fantastic continent he had explored.
It were a task too hard for seraphim,
To suffer, with angelic abnegation,
That unconscious usurpation of creation





CANTO V: FIRE

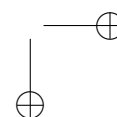
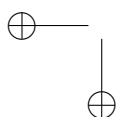
“The City of the Dead”! One living thing
Had moved within its bounds, and it was she,
Lonely and lovely. The Icarian wing
Had drooped, and she had raised him up, and he
Had therefore known the whip and triple sting
That were intended in his destiny.
Did he hate her? Was she proving one more portal
To pass through vainly, seeking things immortal?

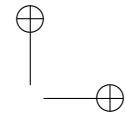
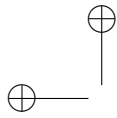
.

Venice! Through the mind’s roof, let the soul leak
In flashing streamlets of romanticism.
Stelio came thither on a spring-day bleak,
That promised an electric cataclysm.
The low-tide odors stank. Obscene and sleek
The canals lay oily, like a black-mass chrism.
In a garden he saw a Judas-tree lift high
Gaunt purple limbs against the thunderous sky.

The storm broke as he reached the weedy stair
Of the Foscarina’s palace. The gondoliers
Got him ashore “with yells and anxious care,”
While violet lightnings plunged their murderous spears
In the Adriatic’s writhing corpse. The blare
Of thunder shocked and rattled in his ears.
The palace trembled to the shattering boom
As he reached the eighteenth-century drawing-room.

She stood among the shadows with that gift,
Herself, in her eyes. Upon some morning dim
We know how presently the mists will drift
Into nothing, that on the summits swirl and swim.
From her face, like mist, the veiled look seemed to lift,
Revealing splendid inner day to him.
It was something he could notice and describe,
Quite in the best tradition of his tribe.





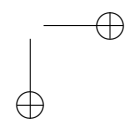
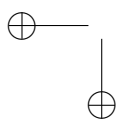
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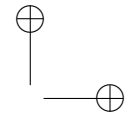
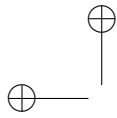
He felt her need of him. He did not feel
His need of her. That would perhaps come later,
Too late perhaps. With eyes like hot brown steel
He looked in hers, as if to concentrate her
Sweet essence into forms that could appeal
To his artist-nature, prestidigitator
Of spiritual values. Lightly he took
To himself the outgoing glory of her look,

Absorbing with a dreadful satisfaction,
What she could offer, whatever it might be,
Oblivious to the action and reaction
That it must have on him in some degree,
Though he felt cribbed and cabined by the attraction
He exercised, and a passion to be free.
Free! A new sort of freedom, it is true,
Freedom from liberty he never knew.

Yet it made him miserable to feel that dying
Within him, that he had not helped to live.
His were sensations most unsatisfying,
As theirs must be who take and do not give.
He should be asserting, and he was denying.
There's little pleasure in the negative.
He felt the pressure of vain gloom and doom
In the dim-gleaming splendor of the room.

Interfused with the unutterable sense
That she had grasped his whole predicament,
And had accepted it with an immense
Sympathy. And this left him ill-content.
Another's generosity prevents
Our forming notions too magnificent
About ourselves. And when in stress and storm,
Those are the notions we desire to form.





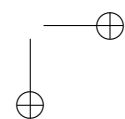
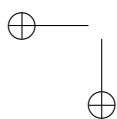
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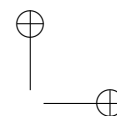
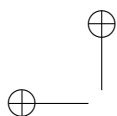
He could not talk of that. Instead he spoke
Of the oration he was to pronounce
That evening. It was like cracking a joke
To dodge an issue which on all accounts
Must be avoided. He quoted many a stroke
From the speech, while waiting breathless for the pounce
Of Fate upon them. Onward the phrases rolled
Glittering, magniloquent, and glacier-cold.

She liked it. She had no more sense than I,
Or any other actor, as to what makes
A true effect, simple, and great, and high.
Hers was the frank spirit that frankly takes
Things at the maker's value, and would die
Defending his rhetorical mistakes.
I wish that some one with a power divine
Would have the taste to do the same for mine.

They dined together in a room perfumed
With tropic blossoms she had thought exotic,
And tried to talk as if they weren't entombed
And dead. They knew their lives were asymptotic,
With a sick knowledge. But neither one presumed
To raise the issue irrepressibly despotic,
That both saw threatening. Each tried to behave
As though no parting were this side the grave.

He knew how false he was. She knew how false
Her hope was, her presentiment how true.
And they talked – of art that by its power exalts
The thought and action of the elected few.
She knew it was but a demoniac waltz
That she must dance to. Bitter well she knew.
Years after she could see him in that minute,
Like a chalice for her soul with nothing in it,





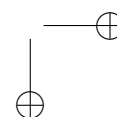
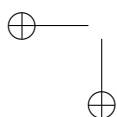
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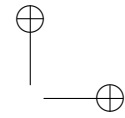
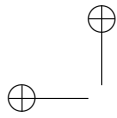
And into which she never could be poured.
Neat-handed minions brought the coffee in.
Departing thunders diminuendo roared.
There was strange comfort in the dying din.
They went to the gondola that softly oared
Through darkened channels silent as a sin.
Suddenly she kissed him in the pressing dark,
Knowing on water one can leave no mark.

They reached the palace where he was to speak,
A hall all glorious with painting and with gold.
Of a sudden he felt himself feeble and weak,
Like a giddy man on a cliff, who loses hold
And claws despairing. The blood left his cheek,
As he gazed on the crowd-monster manifold.
He saw the Foscarina in her place,
The gift of herself as ever in her face.

There is no keener analytic page
In that odd work which Stelio called "The Fire"
Than where he lets his mad impulses rage
About the white-bled corpse of dead desire.
He had magnificent art to disengage
Subtleties of sense. And so before the pyre
Of love he ticked and numbered each sensation,
The while he told the tale of that oration;

His voice's curious sound, re-echoing hollow
From the renaissance cornices, the flaring light,
Saliva in his throat he had to swallow
Before a period could end aright,
His dress-shirt's gleam, a thought that did not follow
From its fellow, and his mind quite blank and white
As unscrawled paper – that must be writ upon.
He paused as if defeated – and went on.





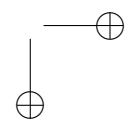
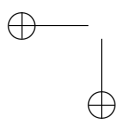
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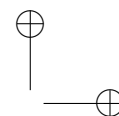
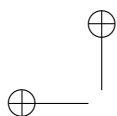
He could see her, and a brace of dukes decayed.
How small she looked! He was divorced from all
This phantasmagoria, this masquerade
Of living. Simulacra crammed the hall,
Not men and women, a mere cavalcade
Of shadows. He endeavored to recall
Himself to life. Like one who has no choice
He harked amazed – to his own obstinate voice.

And suddenly he was back, safe in the strife,
Not many fractured entities but one,
An indivisible I, radiant with life,
Eager for any race that must be run.
Thought gathered in him, full of fire, and rife
With beauty. He had stared down the nether sun
Within, as the eagle stares, had 'scaped the jaws
Of Hell – and was interrupted by applause,

Which multiplied as the speech flamed along.
There was triumph in the air. Quick tremors flew
O'er the raised faces catspaw-like. Like song
His voice rose. Everything turned bright and new.
Images, beautiful, and clear and strong,
Came thronging forth. With dashing strokes he drew
Venice, her birth, her splendor, her eclipse,
Feeling that Pindar's bees were at his lips:

“And so begins her autumn of the arts,
“Harvest divine, to which all thought returns,
“While hope immortal surges in our hearts
“Or the desire to burst our pinfold burns,
“Transcending this dull life of fits and starts,
“Seeking that height for which the spirit yearns,
“Where a more fervent life, a statelier breath,
“Awaits us, or a less ignoble death.”





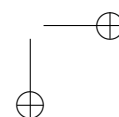
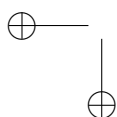
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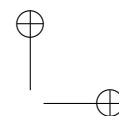
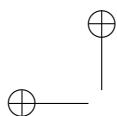
All color, cobalt, scarlet, ultramarine,
(And he saw more than you or I can see)
He lavished, summoning beauty that had been,
Creating new. It will not do for me
To mock that power with impudence unclean,
For there is an aesthetic majesty
At times in Stelio, and the gift to clasp
Loveliness that eludes the vulgar grasp.

Only at the very height bathos will creep
Into the picture – decessit, vergit ad inum.
In the great moments we descry the cheap
Devices, from which nothing can redeem 'em.
Men are we, and must naturally weep,
When the mighty do the things that don't beseem 'em,
Although, if cynical, we may profess
To wallow in the general littleness.

Triumphant, he was conscious of the strain
Of doing something dreadful, though he felt
A Sibylline passion storming in his brain.
The Past he evoked in strange ways with him dealt,
Making wild aspects of the Future plain.
In a new tract of towering thought he dwelt.
This little crowd that had inspired his fear
Was cheering him. Was there another sphere

For him, not bound to enigmatic art
That had defeated him, O oft and oft?
A sterner region where there was no part
For trivial emotion crude and soft,
Where naught reproached the coldness of the heart,
And no interior critic at him scoffed,
A world where he should find full satisfaction
In action, action, action, always action?





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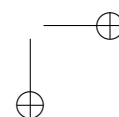
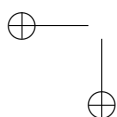
I do not mean at all to intimate
That life to him was immediately clear.
But change went through his spiritual state
As the first crash of plaudits smote his ear.
He made the choice, and did not hesitate.
He saw the course that henceforth he would steer –
And the Foscarina's face, beauty distilled,
A thing passed over, its purpose all fulfilled.

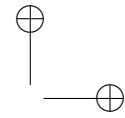
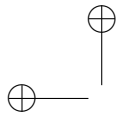
If life be still outlaying and retrenching,
If it be still a thirsting and a slaking,
Perpetual planting, perpetual upwrenching,
Eternal giving and eternal taking,
Continual kindling and continual quenching
Pausing and rushing, a sleep and an awaking,
Or better yet a waking and a sleep,
How should we blame him? One must sow and reap.

His voice rose to the climax. He saw her flinch
In the gleaming crowd, knew that she recognized
How fate had crept upon her inch by inch.
With furious oratory he emphasized
Whatever his point was, felt himself the pinch
Of unaccustomed pain, and realized,
Whatever life he should hereafter lead,
He was at length inexorably freed.

.

On the shore by Mestre they wandered that last time, –
In the languorous and desultory light.
They had visited a villa, the sublime
Quintessence of bad taste, and now the bright
Plain made their eyes ache. Had there been a crime?
They seemed like criminal creatures. In the height
The emerald Euganean summits floated.
And the pair felt like suppliants devoted





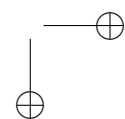
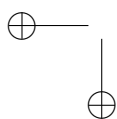
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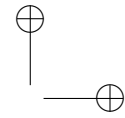
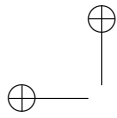
To some terrific sacrifice in a myth
Phantasmal out of the barbaric Past,
Full of queer terrors that they dallied with
Half-curious, then more and more aghast.
They had searched their spirits to the very pith,
And the truth of things was visible at last –
And the hopelessness. He saw without surprise
Once more that look far-searching take her eyes,

The unfathomable thing again reborn
In her, as he gave her o'er and put her by,
And a strange liberated glance forlorn.
“Was she escaping too?” Sardonically
He wondered, feeling an unusual scorn
For himself and his insensibility,
And a justified presentiment interior
That this performance had not been superior.

The awful rendez-vous dragged to a lame end
After a geologic age or so.
The heavy evening lowered to descend.
They got to Venice in the afterglow.
Who has been a lover ceases to be friend.
He said to her succinctly, “I must go.”
She had seen the double death of lust and trust,
And gently answered him, “I know you must.”

Subjoin that Stelio was oppressed by cares
Of another order. When he came home that night
The concierge, who met him on the stairs,
Gave him some letters, which in black and white
Displayed the unwholesome state of his affairs.
His creditors requested him to write.
Ill for the man who at such moments tarries.
Some two days later he was safe in Paris,





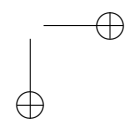
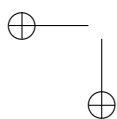
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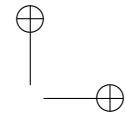
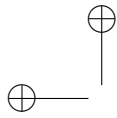
With every debt behind him, and before
New worlds to conquer. French poets took him in.
Those were very pleasant days before the War,
That make our later merrymaking thin
And weakly, though the worm was in the core.
There was some gaiety in their trivial din.
And though the rot they talked was ultra-rotten,
There was quality that's not to be forgotten.

And it was not unpleasant to arrive
Half-fugitive, with a tincture of romance,
And a legend partially superlative,
In the pleasant world of literary France.
Stelio was fully able to survive
The ordeal. His emancipated glance
Took in the future, whose distinct attraction
Was action, action, action, always action.

Paris was something then. You went to dine
In fly-specked, dingy, down-at-heel cafés,
And ate good food and drank delicious wine,
That are no more in these degenerate days.
And there were brainless talk and mirth divine,
DeBussy operas and funny plays,
And typical Frenchmen bursting with good will
Like Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill.

But Stelio was not perfectly prepared
For Monsieur Thomas Rode, whom he found
Chief of that circle. Twenty years had bared
The German's temples, but he liked the sound
Of his own voice still. He bellowed and he blared
Various opinions to the world around.
And Stelio, with a genuine horror, saw
That women looked on Rode with such awe





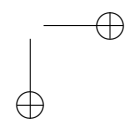
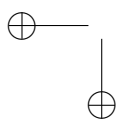
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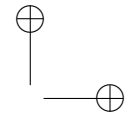
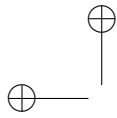
As suits disciples when the prophet speaks.
Demimondaines who alternately slept
With men and with each other, with flushing cheeks
Harkened his blather, happy as the inept
Tongue rattled on. In half a dozen cliques
He was the oracle. A state he kept,
Orchidaceous. Full-blown beauties o'er him purred,
Whate'er he uttered, howe'er it was absurd,

Ancient, or obvious. He had that art,
Which too's absurd and ancient and well known,
Of speaking directly to the female heart,
As addressing himself to one, and one alone.
Each of those ladies felt herself apart,
Chosen from the scores prostrate before his throne.
The more their intellects were ineffectual,
The more he made them all feel intellectual.

Rode's affairs were by no means Platonic.
Roses still crowned his grey and thinning pate.
His look which joined the obtuse with the ironic
Renewed in Stelio twenty-year-old hate
He could not brook that temperament Teutonic,
Where love yet in fantastic triumph sate.
Their natures differed as black does from white.
It all depended on who first should bite.

Stelio discovered this one afternoon
Of the late spring in Rode's ormolu home.
There was a tea in an apartment strewn
With squushy rugs. Odalisques by Gérôme
Hung on the walls. One heard the women croon
And saw the flush on the Germanic dome
Of the host, which roused in Stelio that disgust
Too well explained we feel for ancient lust.





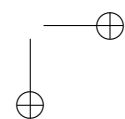
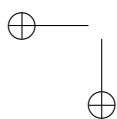
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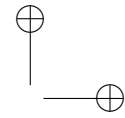
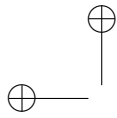
A lady entered splendidly full sail,
As Milton put it, and Congreve after him,
I after Congreve – all hobbleskirt and veil.
Her eyes were seas in which a man could swim
Et cetera. I give up, as doomed to fail,
Hitting off her luxury of breast and limb,
And further hopeless to find nomenclature
Appropriate to describe her curious nature.

She went to Rode as though he were a fount
In the waste of men, and she a thirsting deer,
And seemed to drink a very great amount.
She blandished him, she whispered in his ear.
That other individuals did not count
Was what she seemed determined to make clear.
Her glance went over Stelio top to toe,
When Rode introduced him. She said, “Oh!”

And forthwith turned to the Teutonic spring
Of ultimate wisdom with delight once more.
Stelio was not used to this sort of thing.
Women had seldom held him cheap before.
The attitude damped his intended wing.
Nothing so quickly makes a man a bore
As being thought one. No response whatever
She made to his. It’s hard work being clever

Under such circumstances. Wroth within
He saw on Rode’s lips a smile obscure,
Sardonic, more insulting than a grin.
He was pleased by Stelio’s clear discomfiture.
Stelio was angry as you would have been.
He had a brittle feeling insecure
All of us know. He was supremely bored,
As all must be, at being thus ignored.





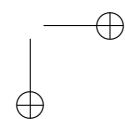
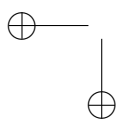
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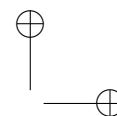
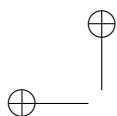
She was Arabella Menken, more or less
Descended from the famous Adah Isaacs,
like her mother, born to bring distress
Where'er she took her beauty. I decry
These fatal women. Their energies depress
And tire one, I can't say exactly why.
But their momentary passion and romance
Turn love into a vulgar game of chance.

Game of chance it may be, but no vulgar game.
The sort worth having is more like mountaineering,
Where glare on snowfields burns the eyes like flame,
And progress may be made by persevering.
When you get up a peak, you're glad you came.
But nobler heights are every hour appearing.
Beyond near valleys soars the distant range.
Effort continues constant in its change.

If change be constancy, then Arabella
Was a most constant female. All her life
Of enthusiasms leather and prunella
Was one successful and continuous strife
With scared conventions, which all failed to quell her.
Whether some one's mistress, or some one else's wife,
It was all one to her. She steered her course
Into a new desertion or divorce.

She proved as mad as any coot or hatter
About what she was wont to call "*the Greeks*,"
Of whose great tongue she had not the least smatter.
She held the opinion that their sculpture speaks,
Which is right, but in the connection doesn't matter.
She'd be photoed in the Parthenon for weeks,
And then, in theatres, jammed to the top-tiers,
Dance Greek philosophy – to financiers.





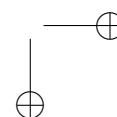
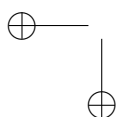
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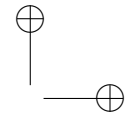
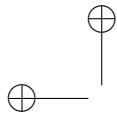
Dancing may be an art. If so, the worst
Of all the arts. It hurts its votary more
Than the others. Exhibitionism-curst,
It makes a man into a kind of whore.
In a woman all her trivial side is nursed
Until she's spoiled. An actress is a bore.
But a dancing-girl can serve me in one way –
Go to mine enemy and spend the day.

She had the insolence of egotism,
And the artistic temperament unkind,
Which has one article in its catechism,
To wit: That only in the artistic mind
Can thought exist. I make this criticism
After experience. On the whole I find
Painters, composers, sculptors, men of letters
Would be improved by studying their betters,

Scientists, peasants, soldiers, business-men,
Even teachers sometimes. The artistic snob
Makes me see red. And nine times out of ten
He's technically unequal to his job.
This gives a scope to his emotion when
Some girl's by, on whose bosom he can sob.
Some women like it. It's flattering to their hearts
To fancy that their flatterers have parts.

There is a theory that men have minds.
What can have started it? If you reflect,
You'll notice differing degrees and kinds
Of phenomena that we call intellect.
But it is only rarely that one finds
Brains that one can on any terms respect.
Most thought is only prejudice implanted,
A logic built of lies we take for granted.





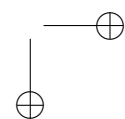
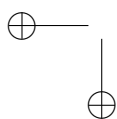
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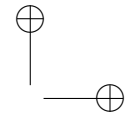
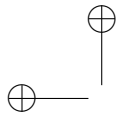
And this goes specially as between the sexes.
Has a man ever thought about a woman
In human history? He only vexes
His soul with pictures of her far too human,
When he thinks them most divine. And he annexes
Mistress or wife without the least acumen,
Following the lure of a fantastic whim.
The girl, on her part, does the same by him.

One must seek the real, it may be, set aside
The silly fata Morgana that we built
Of vapor rising in palatial pride
On the mind's horizon, by false sunrise guilt.
We are but fishers tossing on the tide
Who watch the imaginary fabric wilt
Save for those few whose horse the fates have backed,
For whom the fantasy corresponds with fact.

Now God forgive me for these sick banalities!
I, still possessed by the immortal rage,
Who dreamed of splendid powers and principalities,
And write these commonplaces on the page,
Must somehow come to grips with the realities,
And make 'em actual. For I will engage
My spirit with the beauty that I dreamed.
If it seemed only, then, by God, it seemed.

And that means there was something. I deny
The vulgar judgement. There was something there
In fantasy, more beautiful than I
Could well conceive. And though I may despair
Of painting it, I yet must satisfy
My own desire that blundering here and there
Seeks in the waste monotonous of banality
The unknown fugitive beauty of reality.





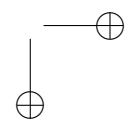
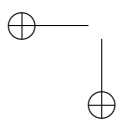
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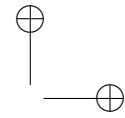
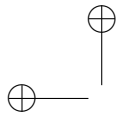
Arabella conquered Stelio. If you ask
Why – why I cannot answer. As he had done
To fifty women, she did to him. Her mask
Never was lifted. He could not read one
Line of her riddle, though she let him bask
In the splendor of her enigmatic sun.
Daily he came to her for light revealing,
Not knowing she was emptier of feeling

Than he himself, a sort of painted show
With sham perspective indicating deeps,
Chimaera bombinans in vacuo.
But she had the slithery art to give men creeps,
Precipitating cataracts of woe,
Coupled with that physical lure that never sleeps,
Though in all her bitter life of waste and sin,
Nothing had ever got beneath her skin.

Therefore she looked and acted as if she knew
Strange matters hidden from the vulgar eye,
Priestess of rites unknown to me and you,
Skilled in queer kinds of knowledge that defy
Masculine subtlety. And it worked too.
Stelio was swallowed by her utterly.
He thought he was in love, and in distress
Plunged into her embracing emptiness.

Into such depths in vain descends the plummet.
There is perpetual horror, and the dim
Shadow over-reaching. Life fails. The abysses numb it
With mortal cold. So it befel with him.
He, who had seen the sun upon the summit
Of life, gazed blind into her darkness grim,
Helpless, involved in the spiritual coil
That quenches fire and brings to naught all toil.





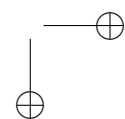
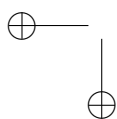
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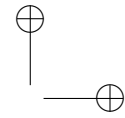
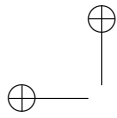
Nevertheless she felt herself inspirer
And animator of something, God knows how.
Never yet woman scattered influence direr.
In some ways she was quite the Gadarene sow,
As Swinburne says. No man on earth could fire her.
There are few methods to enflame a cow.
But this was true. Her joys at once grew double,
If she got other people into trouble.

Stelio was suddenly in jams financial.
The flowers, the wine, the sweetmeats, the caviare
Hit him pretty hard, effecting loss substantial,
Not to mention that new toy the motor-car.
I won't rehearse the details circumstantial.
Italian creditors, that watched afar,
Felt daily bitter care that carks and frets,
Suspecting he would never pay his debts,

Which seemed more likely, as he didn't want to.
He had that pleasing European trait.
In every tongue, including Esperanto,
They have the trick of saying they won't pay.
Believe their promises, then nequior tanto.
Von Papen, Mussolini, Poincaré,
Stalin, and Horthy, all the little pets,
Agree in one thing, – never to pay debts.

Some months beheld the cash wane and diminish
That should have paid how many a tradesman's bill.
Poets are troubled when the funds grow thinnish.
He felt that he must grapple with the ill,
For things were drawing swiftly to a finish.
As authors in their desperation will,
Lightly he took the customary chance,
And wired his publisher for an advance.





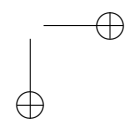
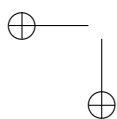
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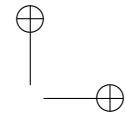
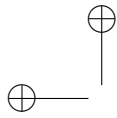
He made that book up, as he wrote the wire
In the squalid little bureau of the Post.
It would be the Foscarina's life entire,
And all that he had done to her – almost.
Through his spirit the premonitory fire
Blazed furious. A wave broke upon the coast
Of the creative. As he evoked her name,
He wrote on the form: "It will be called 'The Flame.'"

Had the Foscarina been a lady's maid
Let down by the butler, would one write a book
About it? As he did, portrayed, betrayed
What gifts she gave, what offerings he took,
More interesting it cannot be gainsaid
Than the gentleman's gentleman's dalliance with the cook,
Simply because, he had a loftier way
Than proletarians use when they betray.

They can betray as well as gentlemen.
You watch your housemaid. Her eyes are quite as red
As a marchioness's could be, if and when
It is discovered she has been in bed
At the wrong time and situation. Then
Tears just as helpless and as hot are shed.
The difference is: She hasn't name or money
Like the marchioness, and naturally is funny.

And if you will, this can be turned to jest
And a reflection on the lower classes,
Whose sentiment is seldom of the best,
Their honey but an unrefined molasses.
But passion's poignant it must be confessed.
Let's not pass lightly on a thing that passes
So quickly, though at times it may endure,
By poets crystallized in literature.





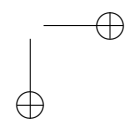
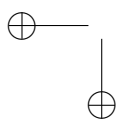
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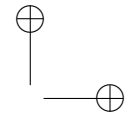
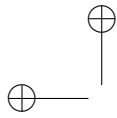
Against hope, from Milan there came that night
Ten thousand lire from the artful Jew
Who ran the house and clearly had in sight
Dividends, and to a millimetre knew
The place to take a scandal at the height,
And what some free publicity might do.
In deepest confidence, his eyes agleam,
He told a friend of Stelio's latest scheme.

I must admit the book's whole tone is bad,
For all the beauty that has made it brave.
It seems to many conception of a cad,
Combined with the performance of a knave.
It makes you furious and it makes you sad.
Yet it may easily transcend the grave.
It has already. It's full of huge suns setting,
And there was noble sport at its begetting.

Possibly I, laboring through nine long years,
Handle, unknowing, quite as bad a theme,
On which I have wasted ineffective tears
And ineffective laughter for – a dream.
But Stelio wrote his tragedy, it appears,
Without conceiving how the thing might seem
To men and women who honorably give
Themselves to noble passion fugitive.

He was past good and evil. He revealed
Superlatively, in a spectacular way
Either side of his spiritual shield,
Here shining splendor, there grotesque decay.
There grinned a demon. Here an angel kneeled.
The skittering pen could neither stop nor stay.
Humility lay down with exquisite vanity,
And penetration dallied with inanity.





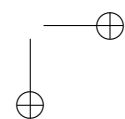
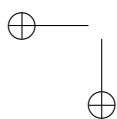
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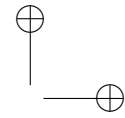
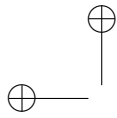
Was it all written for money? I don't know.
I think it might be partly to placate
Some inner self that suffered hidden woe,
Transmuting love to allotropic hate.
The Foscarina had to suffer so,
Simply because she was spiritually great.
Enraged at her capacity to feel,
He lacerated her with whips of steel,

By the same token getting enough to pay
His court to Arabella. I've been rough
Upon that lady, who, it's fair to say,
Was not so much a wanton as a bluff
So splendid that she managed to betray
Herself, as well as others, with her stuff
And nonsense. It is sad that no one knows
The limits of his truth and of his pose.

Anyhow the book proceeded, while he laid
Siege to the dancer – a dubious campaign.
She didn't seem to like him, and repaid
His courtesies with snubs, making quite plain
A preference she always had displayed
For Thomas Rode, whose gigantic brain,
Running over with aesthetic flim and flam,
Was complementary to her native sham.

But one day strangely Rode disappeared
From his known haunts. The ormolu drawing-room
Was vacant. Arabella early feared.
Hers was a just presentiment of doom.
She was almost nice to Stelio in her weird
Manner, that is to say she shared the gloom
She felt. She thought that only a disaster
Of the first class could rob her of "the Master."





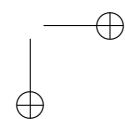
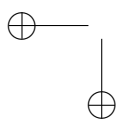
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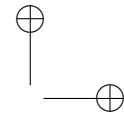
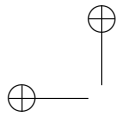
How could she know there was a pretty Dane,
Say half her age, who played the violin
Extremely well, and had a calm and sane
Outlook on life, though Rode took her in?
Like other women she thought he had a brain,
A blunder that amounted to a sin.
But Arabella could not see much humor
In the situation when she heard the rumor

That the great man was settling down in life.
After some fifty-odd Bohemian years
He had fallen in love, and was in fact 'with wife,'
If a new idiom does not shock your ears.
He wanted quiet after storm and strife.
Arabella shed some almost natural tears,
And for six months' eternity and vastity
Preserved memorial and unnatural chastity.

During which period she drove Stelio mad
With Rode's praise, his thought how crystal-clear,
How horrid that this horrid hausfrau had
Dragged the poor master from his proper sphere,
And now she never could again be glad.
(But she'd dine out that evening, never fear!)
Stelio felt cold and triple hatred numb him
For the man who had had her and still kept her from him.

Much Rode cared. Upon Lake Garda's shore
He lived a life of elegant repose,
In love with his Danish husfru more and more.
He had not deserved it, but had found a rose,
Which even worse men than he have done before.
And he forgot his friends, forgot his foes,
And even to be aesthetically censorious,
Secluded in a Paradise uxorious.





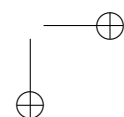
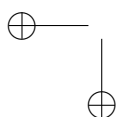
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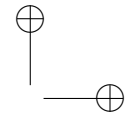
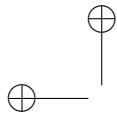
Stelio's book waxed. On many and many a page
He rained his gold, publishing love's defeat.
Spiritual eloquence, erotic rage
Stained with wild eloquence the foolscap sheet.
The drama on the intellectual stage
Was murky but was full of viewless heat.
In Milan the Jewish patron of the Art
Of Letters was resolved to do his part.

He did it well. Whispers in the café
Grew to asides in palaces: "Have you heard?
"It's a tremendous piece of work they say."
"I have seen only a portion of the third
"Chapter." "The Foscarina's hair's turned grey."
Through every circle raced the winged word.
Rome, Venice, Florence did their best to dandle
The new-born, necessarily bright scandal.

Daniele Glauro felt the world grow dull,
When the first rumor reached him. He didn't know
Just how to have it. His high, beautiful,
Self-sacrificial dream had ended so.
He had played Sir Pandarus, and now must cull
A hateful crop of conscientious woe.
The express-train of events had telescoped
The scheme of things for which he blindly hoped.

What he had joined, harsh Fate had torn apart.
He had loved them both without an afterthought
Save this, to serve the lovely in his heart.
Why was the beauty he had dreamed unwrought?
Silently he endured that mortal smart.
Like wiser men he had at length been taught
That one can't mix in other men's affairs
And escape scot-free from trouble that is theirs.





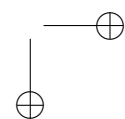
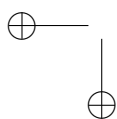
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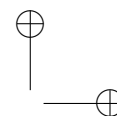
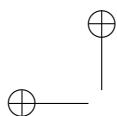
Hence he was not surprised to get one day
A letter in the Foscarina's hand.
She had not the effrontery to say
What she intended, knew he'd understand.
In brief: Was there perhaps a way to stay
This threatening publication to the land
Of secret weakness, and methods to avert
This overt and intolerable hurt

Plotted against her? Daniele felt like screaming,
As he read the letter. Her wild, naked fear
Induced in him like terror unbecoming.
Could a man do such things? It seemed too clear
That Stelio could and would. Pity redeeming
And chivalry proved not to be his sphere.
He wrote his friend, whose ends he now saw clearer
That he would offer forty thousand lire

For the manuscript, which was a splendid sum
In those days. That queer species of despair
Came over him, which strikes our spirits numb
When we discover first that men don't care
Or feel as we do. Why should such horror come
On a woman wholly womanly and fair?
Stelio wired back (the telegraph is faster
And more final) the Italian phrase: Non basta.

Glauro was in Parma when the message came,
The quiet musical city. The two words struck
Sparks from his spirit that grew into a flame
Of wrath: "To drag her through the public muck
For money! Had he neither sense nor shame?"
He was sorry for himself: "What fearful luck!"
And he had thought it such a splendid feather
In his cap, to bring two geniuses together!





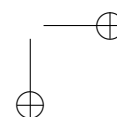
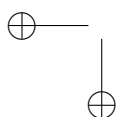
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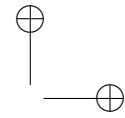
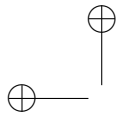
The book appeared, or rather it exploded
O'er the civilized world. Never again will be
Another like it, never a work so loaded
With such poisonous sentimentality,
With vanity so rusted and corroded,
Or animated to such wild degree
By egotism. Emotional insanity
Lacks a continuing interest for humanity.

Stelio in Paris heard the first fanfare
Of trumpets many-voiced, by no means clear.
Vienna blared a disapproving blare.
There was thunder in Berlin's dense atmosphere.
Even New York was heard from. Over there
Intellectuals whispered in each other's ear
Much nonsense in the Greenwich Village style.
But Arabella met him with a smile,

Serpentine, illegible. None could deduce
Her feeling from her look. There was a lure
In her motion of a nature to unloose
Male energies. He felt a hope obscure,
As if she had declared a transient truce
With him at last. If he could but secure
Mere fleshly contact with the dubious elf,
Would that perhaps release him from himself?

They dined immoderately somewhere. The wine
Set up fierce chemical action in his brain.
She seemed to his mad spirit to incline –
After a proper lashing of champagne.
A furious tingle shivered up his spine.
Almost he felt her splendid bosom strain
Toward him, provoking an interior glow.
She said: "Come with me to the studio."





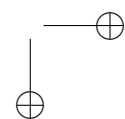
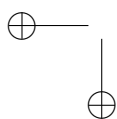
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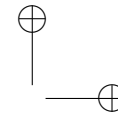
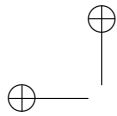
Naturally he went. It proved a mystic place
Up six or seven flights of darkling stair,
A sort of shrine of a discarded race
That worshipped shopworn Gods. The odorous air
Was spiced with burning cinnamon and mace.
Gigantic candles guttered here and there.
A mighty couch stood in a sort of apse,
Where Venus might prove generous – perhaps.

He flung himself upon it. She departed
Like a spirit to some hidden anteroom.
He lay there tense, while his unused eyes smarted
In a swirling atmosphere of dense perfume.
A stupor overcame him, whence he started
Like a man face to face with imminent doom.
She stood there, stricken by the candle-shine,
Enigmatic, lovely, it might be, malign.

Suddenly she was dancing. Like a snake
Sinuous she wove in the strange clear-obscure.
He was all at once prophetically awake,
Aware that there was something to endure.
The enchantress wheeled about. It made him quake.
Fatality was in her and some sure
Terrific presage. Her posture was a mock
He could not miss, that smote him like a shock.

She was all around and in him. Her bosom flashed
In and out the smoky discontinuous light.
She moved all music. Brazen cymbals clashed
When her hands rose. She was death and wrath and night.
Around her loins the slithery filaments lashed
Like serpents. Her eyes were full of dreadful sight,
Pools of black fire. And as she whirled about,
One after one, she dashed the candles out.





CANTO V: FIRE

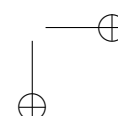
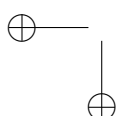
The last light vanished. Her voice rose to a scream
In the sweet dark: “Stelio, you do not know.
“Oh, but you shall. You dreamed a stupid dream.
“I was not made for the Foscarina’s woe.
“You should not have me, though the cosmic scheme,
“For want of that, should into fragments blow.
“Your pitiful chill fire shall never brand me.
“And every woman born will understand me.”

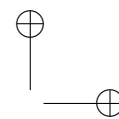
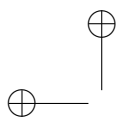
A door slammed to. A light blazed on the stair,
And a repulsive concierge appeared,
Who showed him out with a contemptuous air,
At the same time observing that he feared
No cabs were to be had. In the next square
They yet might be. Abominably he leered.
The apartment towered above, a sombre block
Of silence. Stelio heard the street-door lock.

.

Three thousand miles off, in a lamplit room
A man sate reading, whose long horselike face
Had a look of semi-intellectual gloom,
Coupled with humor a bit commonplace.
The book displeased him as we may assume.
But he read on and on in any case.
As for the book you may have guessed its name.
It was a hack-translation of “The Flame.”

A lady entered, like one who has transgressed
Some minor regulation. “Woodrow,” she said,
“Here is a letter for you from Dean West.”
The reader lifted up his equine head.
“That man,” he growled, “is getting to be a pest.”
His eyes grew obstinate. The humor fled
From the cold mouth. She stood there as half-pleading.
He smiled at her: “The Italian’s better reading.”





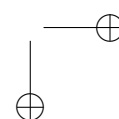
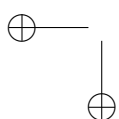
CANTO VI: THE SEA

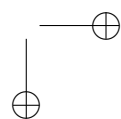
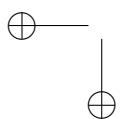
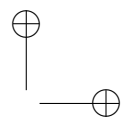
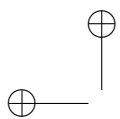
Arma la prora e salpa verso il mondo.

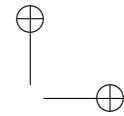
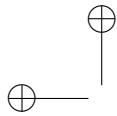
LA NAVE
G. d'Annunzio, 1908

...from that time it has been the rule for the men to march
to battle drunk.

Description of Greece
Pausanias, *circa* 176







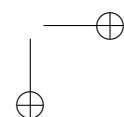
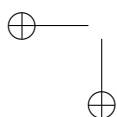
CANTO VI: THE SEA

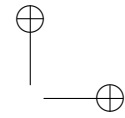
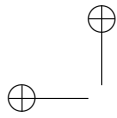
Pio Speranza at Trascara did
Much as the father that had gone before him.
He did not traffic much in matters hid.
He filled prescriptions, and they did not bore him.
He married and begat a bouncing kid.
And his wife's eyes, for ever brooding o'er him,
Expressed to strangers buying powders of him,
That, whatever they thought, it was fun to love him.

He really was an excellent good sort.
The local doctor, the commandant, the priest
Consulted him in trouble as a court
Of last appeal. He did not in the least
Realize how he was trusted. The report
Of his opinion easily increased
The nineteen-thirteen vote, which, strange to state,
Repulsed the socialistic candidate.

"Good chap," the doctor said. The priest opined
That Pio should have followed a career
Wider in scope. "He is too much confined,
"Shut in by our provincial atmosphere."
"At Rome now – where they rightly judge a mind."
The commandant observed it was too clear
That men of parts got nowhere any more.
The priest agreed it was a beastly bore.

Pio perhaps was vain. It pleased him well
That the shop thrived, and that he played a rôle
In his town's life. The literary spell
That for some months had overcome his soul
Had not bemused him. Yet he liked to dwell
With master-spirits. He felt he had a droll
Capacity to taste their mirth and tears,
A gift perhaps denied to his compeers.





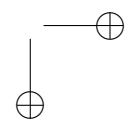
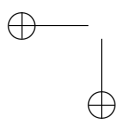
CANTO VI: THE SEA

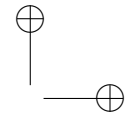
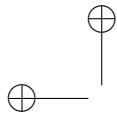
He kept all Stelio's books on a rack beneath
The letter (framed) which he had once received
From the poet. That day amid the mountain-heath
Remained still sacred for him. He believed
In Stelio, one who had deserved the wreath
Of song – and in beauty actually achieved.
He saw perhaps, it's certainly no sin,
Beauty in the poetry, which he put in.

That's why he went to see the Rome première
Of a new play of Stelio's called "The Ship."
The gilded ignobility was there.
Titled rapsallion, sixteen-quartered rip
Looked dazzlingly about 'em with the air
Of arrogant chickens suffering from the pip.
Chandeliers blazed, historic jewels glimmered.
In every box réchauffé gossip simmered.

For him alone perhaps the new-born play
Was the thing, when the pretentious curtain rolled
Upward at length, after prolonged delay.
The audience was critical and cold.
He heard great words of beauty, but dismay
He did not wish to own early took hold.
The truth was growing definite and emphatic:
Éffrena's genius was not the dramatic.

The piece would fail for the best of reasons. It
Was much too dull, too tumid, and too long.
An English party seated in the pit
Were doing it unutterable wrong
By laughing, which was not polite a bit,
At parts the author thought extremely strong.
The British show no kindly cynicism
When other people talk imperialism,





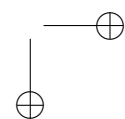
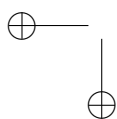
CANTO VI: THE SEA

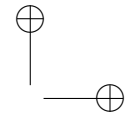
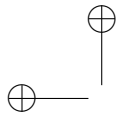
Which was what the play was talking – or rather screaming.
A vaster Italy was the motiv.
But there were lyrical passages redeeming
That stood out from the bombast in relief,
Patches of poetry all fresh and gleaming
And notes of genuine pleasure, genuine grief,
That vanished in the torrent of verbosity
And virtuosity and preciosity.

The Symbolism with repeated blows
Emphasized various folies de grandeur.
A ship was launched, and Italy arose,
And the sea was wide for the adventurer.
And strong men ought to crucify their foes.
The play was weak in plot and character.
The action shattered like a breaking wave –
And the Foscarina was not there to save.

The climax where the fiendish heroine dances
Grew frankly funny, which had not been meant.
The play had fallen a prey to circumstances
Whose dealings are too often insolent
With hapless poets, who must take their chances
Of that and other woes. It was Hell-bent
To Oblivion. Yet 'mid all the yells and mirth
Pio was not the only man on earth

Who, 'neath the rhetoric and stale device,
Beheld some splendid tincture of the sea,
In the poet's regions of interior ice
Guessed something that was very poetry
Authentic, though it were smothered in a trice
By the cataclysm and catastrophe
Of verbiage. Out of profound waters
And that sadistic cinema of slaughters





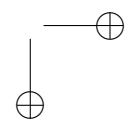
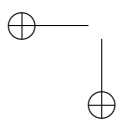
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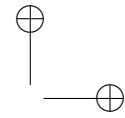
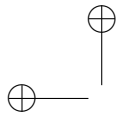
Emerged a spirit ship, risen on the ways
Of thought, with masts and spars of sunnish fire
Real beyond the momentary blaze
Of dream. Uptowering mainsails of desire,
Released from all the wanings and decays
Of life, were thrilling with winds that could inspire.
The image captured Pio. His heart was hot
With rage. These rotters around him, let them rot!

The priest and doctor sate in the café
Discussing Pio late from Rome returned.
They really liked him in their Latin way
The priest in point of fact was quite concerned
By Pio's strange reaction to a play,
For which he felt the contempt of the unlearn'd,
Because it was a failure. "You know 'The Ship'
"I haven't read it – only time to skip.

"It will be on the index. What do you think?"
The doctor said: "A clear case of pathology"
"But Pio likes it." "It is wasted ink
"For me – the merest shadowy apology
"For tragedy." – "Let's have another drink.
"This grappa's good." – "Besides it's poor psychology.
"What Pio sees in it, I can't divine.
"It never sent a ripple up my spine."

And curiously enough just at that time
Anatole France and Georg Brandes met.
At Dijon by an accident sublime,
And there their intellectual whistles wet,
Discoursing high of reason and of rhyme.
"The Ship," said Brandes, "have you read it yet?"
"Éffrena," said France, "is principally technique."
Brandes' tongue went into his Hebrew cheek,





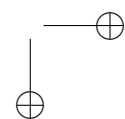
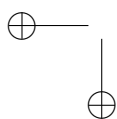
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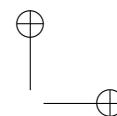
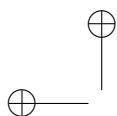
As he replied: “Cher maitre, perhaps, perhaps.
“It is not my idea of tragedy.
“One sees in it evidence of collapse.
“It had, however, some effect on me.
“The woman dancing! – There are thunderclaps
“Of vigor in it. And it well may be
“That the work, anomalous in theme and shape,
“Gains virtue from its effort to escape

“From what I cannot fancy.” Said Anatôle:
“I can. He’s failed with women. Hence he turns
“To something else. He is a burnt-out soul
“That yet desires to flame. And so he burns
“Into patriotism, creating a new rôle,
“It hardly matters what. He only yearns
“To fill his void with something. Being too weak,
“He cannot fill that void. Only technique!

“As for the woman dancing –” and he told
With a lickerish curling of his lecherous lip
How Arabella had struck Stelio cold,
Dancing denial. Acidulous crank and quip
Were his métier. And Brandes roared and rolled
For mirth. The inner meaning of “The Ship”
Seemed clear to him at last. Though I prefer
To think that even the greatest critics err,

Who read a book out of an incident,
Or read an incident out of a book.
They assume too easily that twigs are bent,
As things in their eyes take on such a look
Or such another. I am for one content
That human motives, whether by hook or crook,
Should not be judged so. They are much too hard
For France or Brandes, or the present bard.





CANTO VI: THE SEA

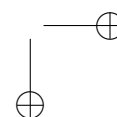
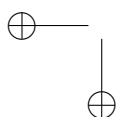
Still I should guess Anatôle was half-right.
Arabella's jest that made the critic's mirth
Of course would hurt a man in his own sight.
I doubt though if it robbed the world of worth.
But it made desirable the untroubled height
Of desire, and emphasized his actual dearth,
Driving him forth forlorn, wildly appealing
To any ultimate origin of feeling.

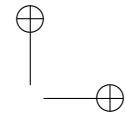
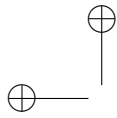
Out of the decadence of sacred fire
The ship sailed. And he hunted on the waters
Under his earth the quarry of desire
That had eluded him in other quarters.
And hence a tragedy to make men tire
With its gaudy pageant of rococo slaughters.
But Brandes too was right. In it there moved
The shade of something that he almost loved

Highly and nobly. Were you an Italian,
You might conceivably be rather struck
In the purple panorama saturnalian,
And the wild explosion of bloodthirsty muck,
By a sort of premonition, a bacchanalian
Prophecy, which foretold by drunken luck
Changes in things, in peoples, and in times,
Difficult to express in facile rhymes.

Therefore the lines that will not wholly die,
Though the crowd mocked! It is much if in the deep
We see the swift and elegant symmetry
Of a great fish, oaring in half-asleep
With the tide, that waking with wild energy
Breaks out of the shoal water with a leap,
Magnificent liberal thing, not to be ta'en
By the skilled hand or the laborious brain.

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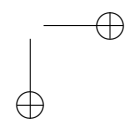
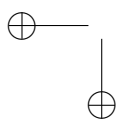
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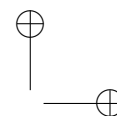
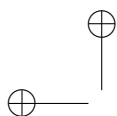
Daniele Glauro somehow overcame
Resentment. I don't see exactly how.
"The Flame" had been like shame on his own name.
He found excuses he would not allow
To his own inadvertent guilt. The blame
Got laid on Fate to whom we all must bow.
Without a genius he could educate,
His would have been a pitiable state.

But it dawned upon him that the task was hard.
O the brave talent! Yet the man denied
Beauty as he made it, and for ever marred
Conceptions Glauro without stint supplied.
Intellectual Baedeker, he triple-starred
Notions that Stelio roughly set aside.
And Glauro naturally was irritated
At the fortune of his fancy evil-fated.

He had hoped (what modest hope!) only to loose
The avalanche of song yet to be sung,
In some way a wild music to induce
In the mind's lute now tuneless and unstrung.
Why would the man not put his art to use?
Why would he never seize the harp that hung
On these Parisian willows? Many an hour
Glauro had wondered: Had Stelio lost his power?

Paris in June is lovely, though I hate
That town like others. But the summer feel,
Through streets that suffocate and sophisticate
Our spirits, on us like a dream can steal.
Stelio and his Achates drank and ate
At a bois restaurant, watching swallows wheel
Through the mauve twilight. A newsboy at a trot
Went past, announcing that some one had been shot.





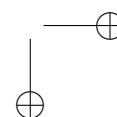
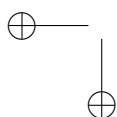
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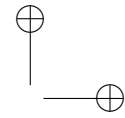
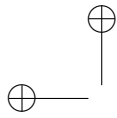
The chilly Chablis, tasting of the grape
On burnt Burgundian slopes, softened the mind.
The sweet world had put on that pleasing shape
Which it assumes for well-fed humankind.
But few suspected no one could escape
The implications hovering behind
The newsboy's cry. Daniele, strange to state,
Ignored again the imminence of fate

When it was on them. The writing on the wall
Delayed a little. The thunder in the air
They felt would dissipate into a small
Electric crackle, an every day affair.
But the writing suddenly was clear to all:
"Mobilisation – Armées de terre et mer!"
And the far off thunder? – How near by were the guns
That made the night air pulse! The Huns! The Huns!

Things were no longer shadowy. Better men
Than Stelio saw the ending of a bad
Old time. A clear-eyed madness held them then,
So clear they did not see that they were mad.
They hailed the trumpets bellowing again
Throughout distracted Europe as the glad
Presage of something actually Heaven-sent,
In the tradition of that continent.

All the world's hate distilled into an act
Before his eyes. Into the sudden abysm,
Where, underfoot, once solid earth had cracked,
Mankind rushed, babbling about heroism.
Organs of speech, alas, remained intact,
Egotism, patriotism, and crétinism.
But the Twentieth Century intellect fell dead,
When the first conscript's peasant blood was shed.





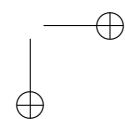
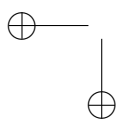
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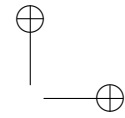
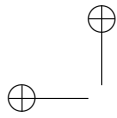
But Stelio knew the Ship was coming in.
River-long battles, upon Paris rolling,
Thrilled him as he heard the far artillery's din,
And tocsins in the brain set up their tolling.
"Italy! Italy! Here's the world to win.
"Destiny points the moment for controlling
"Destiny." It's Destiny's trick, who oft appears
As if she thought we had her by the ears.

Had he then found at last the thing to fight for,
At length the shining and immaculate cause
To live laborious days and scorn delight for,
Caught in a passion, thoughtless of applause
Or self? A thing to live and move and write for.
Yet on his heart stiffened the icy claws
Of thought. He saw himself by strange abstraction
Robbed of that passion and divorced from action.

But he wrote feverishly. His pen dripped fire
Over the pages. He got blood and heat
Into propaganda such as they require
Who sip vermouth at the accustomed seat,
And whose enthusiasm's not entire
For leaving so delightful a retreat.
Sharp diplomats, who value rhetoric
Justly, considered he might turn the trick.

Everything was trembling balances. None knew
Which way the Italian cat was like to spring,
Or whether it would only sit and mew,
What the Pope might intend, or what the King.
Stelio, in Paris where the taubes flew
At cocktail-time, had got the art to sting
Wasplike his people. Bureaucrats were saying
At the Elysées that his debts would be worth paying.





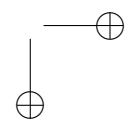
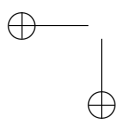
CANTO VI: THE SEA

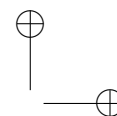
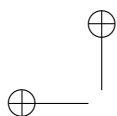
It's true a Milanese solicitor
Was nearly shocked into a nervous wreck
By an unpredictable result of war.
He never had expected Stelio's cheque,
And was accordingly unready for
Dozens of tradesmen falling on his neck.
The sum was large, but with a definite end
In view, why even the French know how to spend.

And they got Stelio to Trascara just
At the high tide of an Abruzzian fête.
The unveiling of a Garibaldian's bust
Was to take place with patriotic state.
The town was crowded, hot, and white with dust,
For the peasantry had come to celebrate.
Pio Speranza, standing in the crowd,
Saw Stelio rise, and heard him speak aloud

At last. Whate'er the cause, an element
All fire was in him now. His voice evoked
Everything Italy has ever meant.
Alternately he smote them or he stroked.
"What is at stake? Fiume, Triest, and Trent?"
"In vain with blood Magenta's hills have smoked."
"The deathless dead at Lissa left no tracks,
"When they went down, rammed by the 'Kaiser Max.'

"There is an Italy – a moving thing
"That captures thought. She's over and above
"The flight of any high-intending wing,
"Or public sentiment, or private love.
"It's she we seek. She has the art to wring
"Blood out of us. We only can remove
"The stone before her spiritual tomb.
"Let us perish for her, who were in her womb."





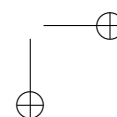
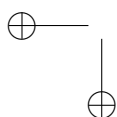
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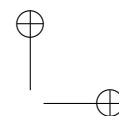
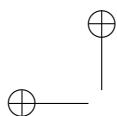
What touches crowds, God knows. The time, the place, –
Suggestions that spontaneously arise
From a phrase, or the expression of a face,
That none can ever hope to analyse,
Brutality of truth, poetic grace,
Gesture or fancy men extemporize,
Spirit of sacrifice or blind desire.
But Stelio's Ship was launched – and all on fire.

There is an Italy. It answered him,
Perhaps to his considerable surprise.
It dwells on Tuscan hills and headlands dim
Where serpentine the Adriatic lies.
It rose like one man to a challenge grim.
It came, with lifted head and burning eyes,
Forward, heroic. No man could take credit
To himself, whoever fancied that he led it.

There it was, blood and bone and sacrifice
That could endure slow torture in the trench,
High courage beautiful that scorned device
Mechanical, explosion, shock, and stench,
That rose to the occasion in a trice,
Dared every terror, and by faith would wrench
Glory from horror simmering o'er the Carso,
And lend a splendor to the life we mar so.

There it was, something nobler than nobility,
Risen superb out of the naked land,
Hurling with a magnificent futility
At enemies it did not understand,
Obeying with incredible docility
The fatal fact whose art is to command.
And we (we are so wise) yet speak with pleasantry
Half-patronizing of the Italian peasantry.





CANTO VI: THE SEA

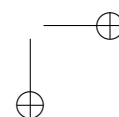
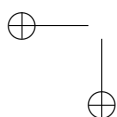
Eight hundred thousand of them, now sleep well
Along that mountainous serrated front,
Where gunless they outfaced terrestrial Hell,
And nakedly endured the shocking brunt.
Nobody by his art will ever tell
The tale, how all the devils came to hunt
On that frontier. Nor can it be denied
It was as dreadful on the Austrian side.

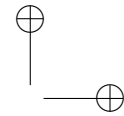
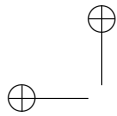
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Pio Speranza in the Dolomites
Had been some six fantastic months, and now
Was pretty well fed up with beastly fights,
Corps à corps, hateful, fought on slope or brow
Of the impersonal and scornful heights.
His nerve was going, a licence we allow
To feeble man exposed to the abysm
Too long, and to the daily cataclysm

Of rifle and machine-gun fire. He lurked
In stony holes all day, or strung barbed wire
On paths where bullets battered as he worked
Upon the front of a cathedral spire
Of shining stone, while his nerves jumped and jerked.
It was awful. Must one always dare that fire?
That Austrian had very nearly copped him.
He stopped, shot in return. By God! he'd dropped him.

It was too sickening. He saw his victim fall
Right down the other cliff's impassive face –
A bloody smudge thrown in a nasty sprawl,
Another military commonplace.
He had no grip upon himself at all.
But the Austrians stopped shooting for a space.
He lit a cigarette behind a rock.
Somehow he felt he had suffered a bad shock.





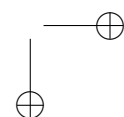
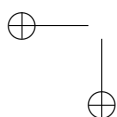
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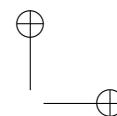
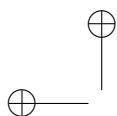
A man came crawling to him as he smoked.
“Captain,” he said, “we got to get ropes down
“The cliff tonight. Remember how they joked
“About a gun last rest? You see that brown
“Thing like a rock. They’ve got the dam’ thing poked
“Down in those stones.” And seeing Pio’s frown
He added: “Colonel’s compliments! By sun-up
“He says we’ve got to get that bloody gun up.”

Pio looked down a hundred metres sheer.
He saw, well camouflaged, the gun below.
To his tired nerves it really did appear
A good deal deadlier than any foe.
“O Hell!” he said, “Get ready all the gear.
“This afternoon tell all ranks to lie low.
“This is the worst thing they’ve hung on us yet.
“You’re about fagged out. Have a cigarette?”

The night descended. The red Alpine flush
Waned on the Marmolata, and they heard
The weary Austrians changing guard, the hush
Was so intense. The makeshift windlass stirred.
Up the first hundred metres with a rush
They brought that dead weight. Everything occurred
Just as it should. He felt a mean and weak
Pleasure that others must hoist it to the peak.

Down through the dark serpentine ropes came dangling, –
Battering the cliff as night-air came and went.
Over their heads indecent stars were spangling
The biting and impersonal firmament.
They struggled with the writhing cords, untangling
Strange coils. But finally they got ‘em bent
Into clove hitches round the piece’s trunnions.
The men above hove hard. They knew their onions.





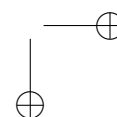
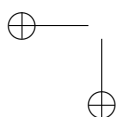
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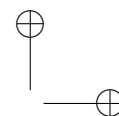
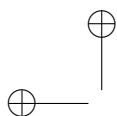
So did the Austrians. On the opposing cliff
They had, they thought, a trick worth two of that.
Suddenly a search-light stretched its finger stiff
Across the dark, and bullets banged and spat
Upon the rocks. The gun rose slowly. "If
"It did not lurch like a drunk acrobat
"On a trapeze," said Pio to himself,
"It would not catch against that bloody shelf."

And then, as if he had made it catch, it caught.
The searchlight, up and down the hateful height,
Systematically and logically sought.
Half the façade of the wild cliff was bright
As though it had been struck by a strange thought.
He saw the gun like Abraham's ram caught tight.
The light showed him his way. And all his spirit
Screamed at him, "If you get to it, you'll clear it."

Upward he swarmed, feeling upon his nape
The piercing light. It struck him like a whip.
His shadow before him was as black as crêpe.
He felt the rock under his fingers slip.
The gun, an unimaginable shape,
Was suddenly hard and round and in his grip.
He tugged against it vainly. What was the use?
It was stuck for ever. By God! It was loose.

Up it went. Hornet bullets pelted round him.
The light climbed with the gun. The firing ceased.
Again the inexorable searchlight found him.
But he did not care, now that he had released
The cannon. God damn them anyhow! Let them pound him.
Then it dawned on him. What a sporting beast
That Austrian was! He was lighting up the track
Down the cliff face – so that Pio might get back.





CANTO VI: THE SEA

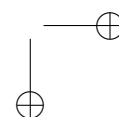
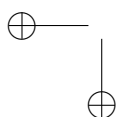
The fact is it was the Hell of a feat at arms,
A bit of unreported heroism,
Which together with war's ineffable alarms
Combined the nastier side of Alpinism.
The Austrian was brave, and courage charms
The gallant. Across the horrible abysm,
With chivalry one cannot praise enough,
He lighted down the man who'd done his stuff.

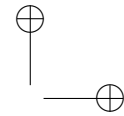
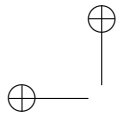
Pio went up again, but by the trail
Commonly used, feeling with bloody hands
Familiar stones. It took an hour to scale
That ramp of rock, where yet a rude cross stands
On the summit, telling its forgotten tale.
He reached the emplacement and issued his commands
To a group of privates who were nearly done
But much relieved to have got up the gun,

As they later got ten loads of ammunition.
Pio short-sightedly stared through the sights
At the target. What they call "War of Attrition"
Is really difficult in the Dolomites.
He spotted the inimical position.
Dawn flared in splendor o'er the shining heights.
Joyful he heard the seventy-five's tart roar.
That gun was worth a whole damned army-corps.

.

And Stelio? Stelio hardly knew at all
What thing had happened. The daily multitude,
Whose myriad throat lifted the brazen bawl
When he spoke, and drank the perilous stuff he brewed,
Confused him. The vast mob's soul-shaking call
At Rome, Milan, Verona, the rude and crude
Emotion he evoked had galvanized
A side of him that had been paralysed,





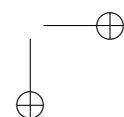
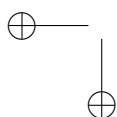
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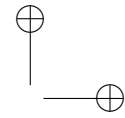
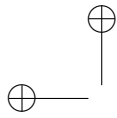
So that he felt it as though living twitch,
When the current came back to him from the crowd.
He had but as it were to turn a switch,
And their fire made him firm and fierce and proud.
Their passionate faces, his own fever-pitch
Of rhetoric, the bellow harsh and loud,
All worked together in a circuit grim
He had done this thing to them – and they to him.

Italy had rushed to war with much confusion,
Like all great powers. Philosophers should laugh
Heartily at the curious delusion,
Nursed in the soul of every general staff,
That plans work out. The terrible intrusion
Of chance determines a lot more than half
What happens. Faint hearts, hot heads, faulty maps
Underline emphatically the word ‘perhaps,’

In spite of Kriegsspiel, discipline, cool brains
Trained for the juncture – Monfalcone fell.
The troops that sweated in the Venetian plains
Saw the Carso in the heat quiver and swell
Like a fatal bosom. The returning trains
Were indication that the supply of shell
Was insufficient. Their burden would no more
Think that there was much science in a war.

Fat majors told off to hold Stelio down
Conducted him to trenches where they showed
The art of modern battle, whose chief crown
Is to be where hostile shells do not explode.
The men were keen as mustard. He made known
Their valor in a military ode.
But ignorant privates as the bard passed by
Would make the sign against the evil eye.





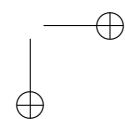
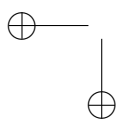
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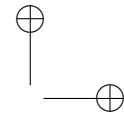
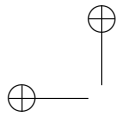
Such visits are too likely to excite
The enemy, who's sensitive and will
At times forget himself and start a fight,
Seeing something doing from his neighboring hill.
And logically of course he might be right.
Stelio's inspection-trips sufficed to kill
A lot of men who meant to do their bit.
And somehow the survivors noticed it.

He saw the storm of an Austrian position
Before Gorizia. Seven stricken waves
Went valiantly to death and to perdition
Mainly to fill predestinated graves,
Not included in their personal ambition.
He watched from the best camouflaged of caves,
Through excellent instruments by Bausch & Lomb,
Their journey's end who never would come home.

He saw much nearer things by no means swank,
What came back after. He never could forget
Litter-bearers stumbling, their pale faces blank
With effort, all a muck of dust and sweat.
They struggled two by two behind a bank,
And laid their burdens down. The surgeons set
To work in the shadow of the Austrian fire
Raving overhead like Hell broke loose entire.

Two men he noticed while the surgeons shot
Anti-tetanic in and dressed the streaks
In their torn flanks. One of them moaned a lot
And tears of pain ran down his pallid cheeks
Stelio stared at him. He felt the face was not
Unfamiliar. Was it years ago or weeks
He'd seen him? Ah, he's changed. Yes, he was sure.
By God, it was, Tartaruga's paramour,





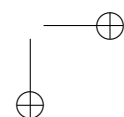
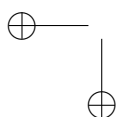
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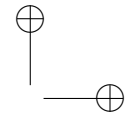
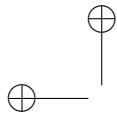
The greasy effeminate boy degenerated,
Now full of Austrian shrapnel. At his side
A man lay silent. His large eyes dilated
Were quiet, and he neither moaned nor cried
When the surgeon thrust a bistoury miscreated
Into his wound. Agony conquered pride
A little. Stelio, like others of his race,
Would have small reason to forget that face.

It frowns at you, stencilled on many a wall
Today, though at the moment it appeared
Pathetic, painful, obscene with filth, and small,
And blurred, moreover, by a three days' beard.
Stelio turned away. There was no use at all
In staying. The heroic waves had cleared
The hill-top, and had paid a smaller toll
Than might have been expected on the whole.

So he went his way to animate the troops
Elsewhere, who listened to him quite besotted,
While before them he looped metaphoric loops.
The flatulent majors, at his heels that trotted,
Opined that when the soldier's spirit droops
Some patriotic hokum double-shotted
Has value. A staff-officer oracular
Said, "We must let you do something spectacular."

They cooked it up among them. Safe in Rome
A chief of section of the usual kind
Thought up a gesture fairly venturesome,
Apt to embarrass the foe's inquiring mind,
Upset his confidence, and carry home
Alarm to the civilians far behind
The battle-front, who ought to be dejected,
And had so far been more or less neglected.





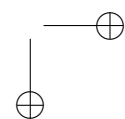
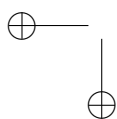
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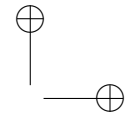
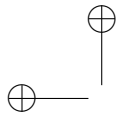
“You are going to raid Vienna, but won’t drop
“A single bomb. This will suggest to them
“That we are now decidedly on top.
“Bombing towns is a practice we condemn,
“And which we naturally desire to stop.
“They can hurt us. We can’t sustain with phlegm
“Attacks of the nature. Our cities, as appears
“From the map, are much too close to the frontiers.”

So it was all arranged, Stelio to go
Titular chief of that tremendous raid,
With ten Capronis, a vast painted show
Of terror, to make the hapless town afraid.
They would drop leaflets prophesying woe,
But no explosives of another shade.
Aeroplanes built in the then current styles
Couldn’t carry dangerous bombs five hundred miles.

Dear God, what work for the poor engineer
You never heard of, and further never will!
Figuring that should have taken half a year,
Done in a month! Decisions that might kill,
Decided offhand in despite of fear
By the responsible who’d pay the bill
If things went wrong. Well anyhow they braved
Disaster, and not one spark-plug misbehaved.

There came the scene at the preposterous field
Where the huge things trundled out into the dark,
The pilots’ faces to endeavor steeled
In the dim light ’neath the hangars vast and stark,
Hot eyes to cold audacity annealed,
Here and there a flash-light like a fire-fly’s spark.
The motors roared their crepitating thunder.
Stelio got on board. He had not time to wonder





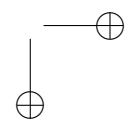
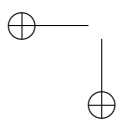
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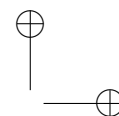
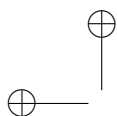
At all this strangeness. The many-dialled board
Before him gleamed with sinister phosphorescence.
Loud and more loud the triple motors roared.
All things acquired a touch of evanescence.
From watch-towers down the field suddenly poured
White light in its intolerable quintessence.
The props were whirling, a transparent blur.
Round him he felt the monster groan and stir.

Out of that flare into gross dark the flight
Went up, like huge flies humming to the ceiling.
Steadfast they took formation, while the night
Roared with their motors manoeuvring and wheeling.
They found at last each his due rank and height.
Then, as a sodden dawn came weakly reeling
Over Triest, in a huge V enigmatic
They hurled across the dank grey Adriatic.

They saw the shell-pocked Carso drift behind
Between the tatters and the wefts of cloud.
Steady they hung, while a terrific wind
Blew the world back. Beneath them all the loud
Rebellowing front seemed dumb as a dull mind.
Great guns were firing but the motors cowed
All rival noise. The mountains, which had towered
Before them like a rampart, shrank and cowered

Down into mere unsystematic heaps
Of slag anomalous, white, blue, or brown.
You do not know them for majestic steeps,
If, instead of looking up, you're looking down.
Over them they leaped, as in a dream one leaps,
Pleased with excitement in a terrified town,
Laibach. They saw the Austrian Staff run out,
Expecting dubious gifts from Greeks no doubt.





CANTO VI: THE SEA

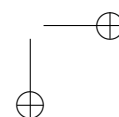
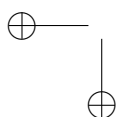
Then North and East away, and ever the roar,
Ever the whistle of the wires and struts!
The metal clangor makes the ear-drums sore,
And penetrates your very bones and guts.
The unknown world beneath lies like a floor,
Open to the view. Yet the same spirit shuts
Your understanding. You comprehend no letter
Of its riddle, though you may perceive it better.

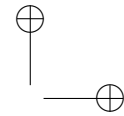
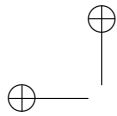
“There,” said the pilot, or rather pointed. A gleam
Flashed on the horizon, like visionary false
Mirage, and grew at length into a stream,
In many minds connected with a waltz.
They rushed along it, while a startling beam
Of sunlight, out of Heaven’s central vaults
Broke through the cloud, and with its sudden fires
Smote on Vienna’s palaces and spires.

The suburbs swept beneath. Then suddenly
As the telepathic knows, all of them knew
That they were seen. A wild vivacity
Was in the streets, as folk ran out to view,
Or struck by terror turned about to flee.
On to the centre of the town they flew,
Watching like Gods upon a raid titanic
The visible symptoms of the soundless panic.

From Stelio’s plane fell many a flickering leaf
Of propaganda, circling slow and white,
Turning and twisting, till it came to grief
In Prater gutters, where one was found that night
By a cripple, Vienna’s humorist-in-chief,
Who laughed his head off. I think that he was right.
Stelio, he said, whom he with pleasure read,
Was apt to be over his reader’s head.

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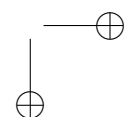
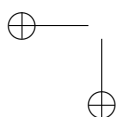
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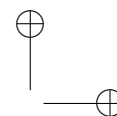
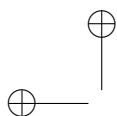
Pio Speranza at Trascara sat
At his drugstore-door, slowly recovering from
One of the worst of modern ailments that
Can hit a hero – shell-shock. He would go numb
At moments, since that bomb had knocked him flat,
And foam at the mouth – a little – and be dumb,
And a prey to loathly reflexes, until
He could beat 'em by an effort of the will

Which was wont to wander ever so far away,
Leaving him feeling weak and insecure
And comfortless, afraid of night and day
And people, undefended and unsure.
Even his wife had got at times that grey
Look all things had, which he could not endure.
But her eyes summoned something to their deep.
And sometimes in her bosom there was sleep,

When came queer visions of a ship that sailed
Somewhere. Bound whither? His mind, it seemed, was tired.
The question, whatever it implied, entailed
Effort he could not make, though he desired
To know. Once was a spirit-ship. He quailed
Before an enigma. Perhaps the thing had fired
His nature once – before he was like this,
Afraid, and on the edge of an abyss.

He had a cigarette, he had the paper,
And did not know quite what to do with either,
If his leaping nerves were always going to caper.
But will came from deep waters for a breather,
And made him feel she was once more the shaper
Of his fortune, trampling vast despair beneath her.
He strove to read. With an effort greater yet
He lighted the vibrating cigarette.

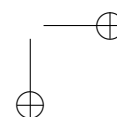
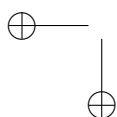


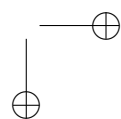
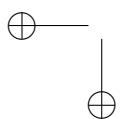
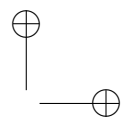
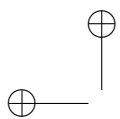


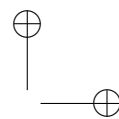
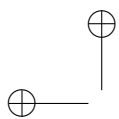
CANTO VI: THE SEA

The newsprint swam before his eyes like motes,
Now sharply visible, now out of ken.
‘It must have meaning – certainly denotes
‘Something. Of course! That’s why it’s done by men.
‘This is the type an editor devotes
‘To important things. Has something happened then?’
Clearness and sense for a moment wave-like came.
At last he was reading. It was Stelio’s name,

Stelio’s! who had got a flock of decorations
For that frolic o’er Vienna. Belgium, France,
England, Russia, and a lot of minor nations
Had seized on the occasion as a chance
To show their unity. Pio read the citations.
His nerves a moment ceased their devil-dance.
He’d have an instant’s peace ere they began
Anew. “My God,” he said, “What a brave man!”



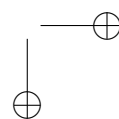
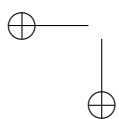


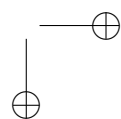
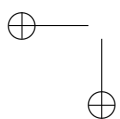
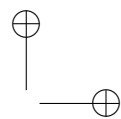
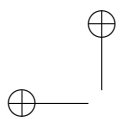


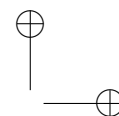
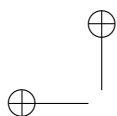
CANTO VII: FIASCO

...irrompe il Futuro come fiume.

ALLA DIVINA ELEONORA DUSE
G. d'Annunzio, 1902







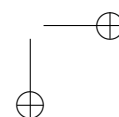
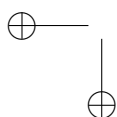
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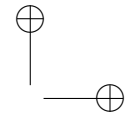
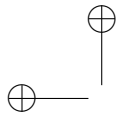
In my garden in Florence I walk and meditate
Matters I do not understand too well.
But the wistaria overhangs the gate
Where the tram passes. There's a sweet girlish smell
From the box-hedges. These Italians hate
Being made fun of. I shall have to dwell
Elsewhere, when this book appears. I'm wroth at times
At the construction they'll put upon my rhymes,

Thinking that I portray their pettiness,
As if, forsooth, no other race were small,
And that I mock their vanity or distress,
(Which isn't the object I've in view at all)
And that I try to make a hero less
Than he has made himself, which I should call
An impossibility. That's not my point,
Nor am I railing at times out of joint.

But I'm amazed to the bottom of my soul
At man's abuse of his tremendous powers.
Stelio had strength and genius to control
Beauty, yet chiefly made fantastic flowers
For intellectual hats. Why should his rôle
Be rhetoric only, even in those hours
When he escaped into the realm of fact,
The imperial scene of action, where the act

Should be the current coin? When rapid-firing
Guns to the trench discordant truth were telling,
Why should he still be posturing and tiring
Men's hearts? With nations quaking and bugles yelling,
Why must he babble balderdash inspiring?
And why did not simplicities come welling
From a spirit tuned to the tragedy of things?
Because men like harmonics on the strings





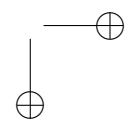
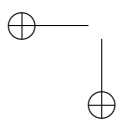
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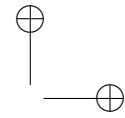
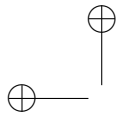
Of cheap effect, and to attitudinize
Themselves. Although an over-sea barbarian,
Dull, slow, by no means powerful or wise,
I could be his psychological grammarian.
His eyes seek always an eternal prize.
And that eternal prize is the dead carrion
Of thought, mere vulgar adolescent dream
Of forcing others to accept his scheme

Of things. Why should a Yugoslav accept
It more, than he accepts the Yugoslav?
Both views are equally common and inept.
And the bystander has the choice to laugh
Or weep. And many a woman will have wept,
Ere either shall possess the cenotaph
Of conquest. God! I write not to deride
But it's poor sport to see Man crucified,

Or to see these wretched strong men, who dictate
Nonsense to nations sick of chauvinism,
Who rather need in their enfeebled state
Iodine or thyroid. All this paroxysm
Of so-called strength is but transfigured hate
Born of debility. The cataclysm
Only delays. Whatever shall survive
Will curse itself that it is yet alive.

God is behindhand with the Apocalypse.
He's much to blame. A Satan in his place,
Though doubtless capable of venial slips,
Would have lifted up his voice against the race
Ere this. But God sits still in the eclipse
Of the Creation which is his disgrace,
Obviously helpless, destroying, so they say,
Some star at the limits of the Milky Way.





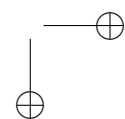
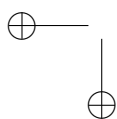
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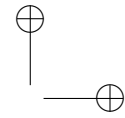
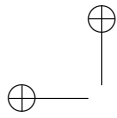
Caporetto came and went. Cadorna fell.
The King played up, and Diaz came in view,
Who had the luck to finish pretty well
Everything Cadorna had in mind to do.
The Austrian bolt was shot. The fatal spell
Was broken. It was time for a break through.
See Conrad's memoirs. Nothing on earth moves faster
Than a great empire crashing to disaster.

Stelio had seen some battle. By this he knew
Suffering. He had been injured in the eye
By an unliterary bomb that blew
Inconsiderately up as he passed by.
From that event further renown he drew,
And it gave the sanction of reality
To the orations he was wont to make
Semper et ubique, just for old sake's sake.

Pio Speranza heard one, as he passed
Through Milan, recovered, back to the front once more.
A crowd had gathered, silent, grim, and vast,
Expectant. In the habiliments of war
The poet from a balcony blew his blast.
Pio suppressed a critic in the core
Of his nature, hinting in a horrid way
That the speech was not the sort of thing to say.

"Trumpets of Milan, from the Carroccio blaring!
"Eagles of Rome, from the Capitol that scream!
"Dead of Caporetto, at the cold sky staring!
"They come once more to violate our dream.
"Rise up, you dead and dying and despairing,
"For we are standing at the fatal stream.
"If we fail, if we fail now, then God will die,
"And those our dead stare at a deader sky."





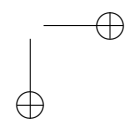
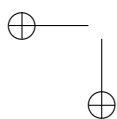
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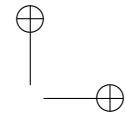
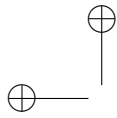
Fifteen hours later Pio was under fire,
Where Diaz cautiously was trying out
Austrian despair, that didn't dare retire
And died heroically in the redoubt
Where it fell exhausted. In the Piave mire
Pio had little time to think about
Speeches. In fevered weariness he fell
Asleep like his tired foes. It was just as well.

All war is a damned nuisance. Only defeat
Has got the high art to disorganize
Great armies more than victory. They beat
Their way o'er the Piave. The October skies
Were full of wings. The Austrian defeat
Was plain to pilots with incredulous eyes.
But Pio, under the barrage's thud,
Was aware mainly of misery and mud.

They were advancing though. By night they came
Into new trenches. In the dawn they saw
Ramparts before that looked the sort to flame
With machine-guns. They got ready in the awe
All feel before attack. He sought to tame
The fear that rose compelling in his craw.
Zero hour! With that horror still in petto,
He took 'em over, yelling, "Caporetto!"

The barrage went on and left them. Not a shot
Spat from the sinister ramp. They tumbled in.
Only some ultra-dead men and a lot
Of loose equipment! Glad of a whole skin
Pio looked round. For a moment he could not
Believe his eyes. Despite the roaring din,
There was no foe, whether to left or right,
Or in front of him. There wasn't any fight.





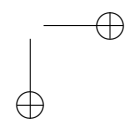
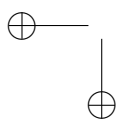
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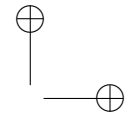
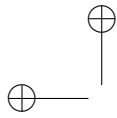
A messenger came running from the rear,
Prancing and leaping like a hare at play,
Certainly acting, as I greatly fear,
In a thoroughly unmilitary way.
Was he drunk or crazy? Everything was queer.
Even the guns had given o'er the play.
Pio read the Colonel's message. Was he blind?
"Stay where you are. An armistice has been signed."

Some three days later they marched into Triest,
The city they had striven to redeem.
They crossed the trenches on the Carso's crest
No man alive could storm, as in a dream.
Pio, among the tramping host, obsessed
Still by bewilderment, heard the mad crowd scream,
"Viva Italia," and came to earth a bit.
"Italia, O Italia!" That was it.

Into that gorgeous harbor slid the fleet,
Still as a thief, after three stricken years.
Letters for Pio, which I won't repeat.
They were not meant for other eyes or ears.
Could he turn homeward, now the foe was beat?
Politicians working up the new frontiers
At Paris, with their nonsense, countermanded
Return. The armies could not be disbanded.

And there were queer alarms, wild rumors that
There might be further trouble. Round and round
The Staff moved troops. The Yankee autocrat
At Paris caused anxiety profound,
Who knew no more of Europe than my hat,
But felt himself upon firm moral ground.
As his sense of virtue momentarily rose higher,
He grew more Messianic than the Messiah,





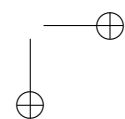
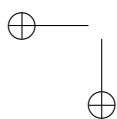
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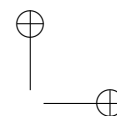
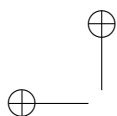
A practitioner of statecraft, who believed
What people told him, as the Fates had fated,
And, when his high ideals weren't achieved,
Was justifiably much irritated.
Like all of us destined to be deceived,
He perished broken-hearted and checkmated.
I shan't attempt to sketch his righteous wrath
When he found there was a poet in the path.

For strange reports were reaching Paris too,
Of an Italian counterstroke malign.
There were, it seemed, an unregenerate few,
Whom the new revelation all divine
Left cold. The petty town of Fiume grew
A portent perilling a vast design,
And Stelio, raging up and down all Italy,
Was complimenting Wilson not too prettily.

Orlando soothed the Savior of mankind,
And so did Balfour. So did Clemenceau.
They told him that he was a master-mind
And a poker-player, and they ought to know.
They told him his ideas were gold refined
And many other things that were not so.
In short they made a monkey and a donkey
Out of him. Pio reached a town called Ronchi

One night, with orders to protect and guard
A perfectly enormous motor-park.
He duly took it over – not a hard
Assignment. He came in just after dark,
Posted his sentinels, and read the card
Covering responsibility. A stark
Fatigue, beginning to be felt at length,
Held him. He was at the limits of his strength.





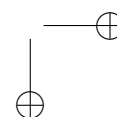
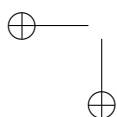
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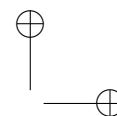
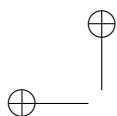
He went to the headquarters and sat down
Behind the desk, and slept in the swivel-chair.
Dreaming he saw the ghastly summits frown
In the Dolomites, and shrapnel in the air,
And blasts of high explosive bursting brown,
And poor men, horribly hurt. He woke, and there
Stood Stelio Éffrena, one eye a gleam,
Speaking like a torrent, real as the dream.

“Captain,” said the poet, “The tricksters have outplayed us.
“All that you fought for has been thrown away.
“Whatever was our claim, they have gainsaid us.
“Our birthright’s sold, and the Devil is to pay.
“Wilson with his Yugoslavic soul betrayed us.
“You are a hero. You will not betray.
“We must save Fiume. Come with me and die!”
Pio, half awake, stared at the burning eye.

The room was full of men. The bard went on
Sputtering with passion: “All depends on you.
“Give us the cars before all hope is gone.
“We will take Fiume, and will hold it too,
“To the death. At Paris let them think upon
“A fact that has not come into their view –
“Brave men, like you, who are not frightened at
“The blood and thunder of a diplomat.”

It was really Éffrena. It was no dream.
Trascara was antipodes away.
Pio was going with the unknown stream.
The poet’s myrmidons were white and grey
With excitement. Pio rose, a savage gleam
In his sleepy eyes. “I never will betray,”
He said, “The cars are ready, sir, for you.
“And I shall have the honor to go too.”





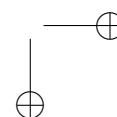
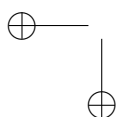
CANTO VII: FIASCO

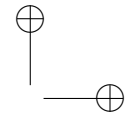
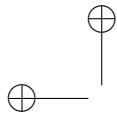
Outside in the darkness milled two thousand men
Of every age and type and class and rank.
Straight to the cars they all dashed there and then,
And Pio with them. An unthinking blank
Possessed his mind. Consciousness came again,
As he heard at least a hundred motors crank,
And vehement exhausts like cannon bark.
Suddenly he was rolling through the dark.

And then he slept once more. When he woke up,
They were half across Istria at a full stop.
A general officer (God damn the pup!)
Had halted them. There was sand in the man's crop.
He spoke like a machine-gun plup-plup-plup.
But Stelio argued and came out on top.
The General weepingly embraced the bard,
And he too was enrolled in the Young Guard.

Dawn came, thick-shotten, 'neath a towering mist –
Across the long hills snored the cavalcade
Of motors. He felt like a somnambulist
Suddenly roused. What was this nightmare raid?
There was the city. They had brought their grist
To the right mill. No, he had not betrayed.
Under the cloud, malignant, cold, and gloomy,
Roaring, the armored cars rolled into Fiume.

History records no odder episode.
Stelio was happy. This divine defiance,
Tension of passion ready to explode,
The sentiment of power and self-reliance,
Held him for a little. He drew up the code
To govern the city, and displayed some science
In the draught of the edict. Nothing could be properer
Than its ultimate provision – for grand opera.





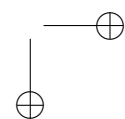
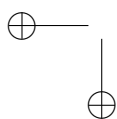
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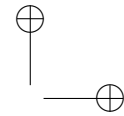
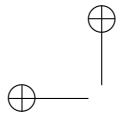
It was queer realization of the dream
Boys play with, of possessing absolute power
At least for a moment. Orders by the ream
Flowed from his desk, and were fact in the same hour.
Subordinates, with fiery eyes a gleam,
Through the devoted town began to scour,
Evicting with expressions energetic
Such persons as they found unsympathetic.

Recruits came thronging, deserters from the host
That had won the war, fed up with discipline
And disillusioned perfectly (hence most
Eager for fresh illusion) drifted in.
It seemed at first that there was not a ghost
Of a chance. But who could say what might begin
From the venture now? Wilson, he heard with pride,
Had several times attempted suicide.

Yet the thing palled. Was everything a bore
That started splendidly only to cease,
Women, power, literature, and peace and war?
Was there nowhere the redemption and release
That the self-asserting spirit struggled for?
He felt himself only a frontispiece,
A Rienzi fallen in the sere and yellow,
A faded Byron, shopworn Masaniello.

And always the necessity to stand
Rock-like, while with subtlety his traitorous heart
Whispered: "These men are with you heart and hand."
"In God's name, have you the least lot or part
"In what they feel? You brought about and planned
"This business. Have you yet found out the art
"To believe in it? Better the frank confession.
"This too has proved imperfect self-expression.





CANTO VII: FIASCO

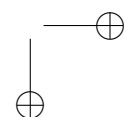
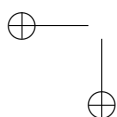
“What’s Italy to you? Pio that hauled
“The field-gun up the Dolomitic cliff
“Is luckier than you. He is enthralled,
“Engulfed by the ideal. He is stiff,
“Inflexibly decided. When you called,
“He came without a murmur. I wonder if
“The converse of the proposition’s true.
“Do you think you’d come, if he should call on you?”

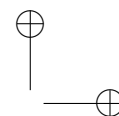
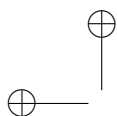
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A pair of English poetesses sat
In Venice, eating scampi. They were long
Lank girls, gaunt-limbed, white-faced, with breasts as flat
As futurist verse. Their dresses were all wrong.
And each of them was sporting such a hat
As seven years before was going strong.
They had an air of being virgins still,
Likewise Uranian, Lesbian, what you will.

They were bound upon adventure. Evening light
Coated with fire the serpentine canal,
That crawled between the palaces. A bright
Interest that seemed partly hysterical
Was in their eyes. “You won’t forget this night,”
The elder said, “I’m sure I never shall.”
They crowned the cups with Asti sweet and spumy.
The younger said “It must be queer in Fiume.”

Presently a man gold-braided, with a look
Officious that sufficiently proclaimed
He was a myrmidon of Thomas Cook,
With a low reverence to their table came.
“Mesdames,” he said, “Ze good stateroom was took,
“But we have got anoizzer quite ze same.
“She sail in one half-hour as quick as wink –
“Eet is time – how say you? – you get board, I sink.”





CANTO VII: FIASCO

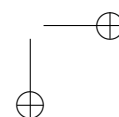
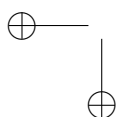
Next morning they were in the fated town.
A blithe lieutenant led 'em from street to street
To the headquarters. The sentry with a frown
Examined papers. With decorum meet
They were shown to an anteroom where they sat down.
Their officer-escort chattered tweet-tweet-tweet.
An adjutant, Pio, entered, made a bow,
And said, "The Commandant will see you now."

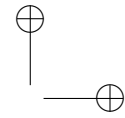
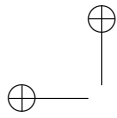
They followed to a great room. At a desk
Sate Stelio, propping with one hand his forehead,
In a position wholly picturesque
And half-convincing, writing. A notion horrid
Assailed them, that he was not so Dantesque
As they'd expected. The style was a bit florid.
They could not bear to think he looked a rotter.
He rose to meet them, folding to the blotter,

Kissed their hands duly, said he had heard they wrote,
And left the room – to get his photograph.
"Like to see a poem?" the guide hissed in his throat,
And sprang to the desk with a boy's mischievous laugh.
Suddenly his face became a frog-like bloat
Embarrassed. The blotter proved a cenotaph.
There, where they'd seen him writing half a minute
Before – an empty case, no paper in it.

The photograph in Chelsea hangs today.
It shows a man who props his brow and leans
Forward at his escriptorio, writing away.
His look implies: "I know just what life means."
That is at least what it is meant to say
To those who haven't been behind the scenes.
As photographic art the thing's exciting,
And naturally you can't see what he's writing.

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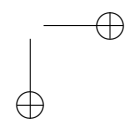
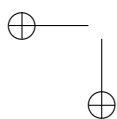
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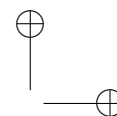
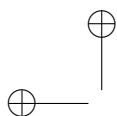
I wonder who are loneliest, men obscure
Keeping the even tenor of their way,
Day-labor, medicine, law, literature,
Or men like Stelio in the piercing ray
Of full publicity, for which no cure
Has been invented. I think common clay
Has got the best of it in the long run,
Being less admired for things it hasn't done.

Stelio, at any rate, upon the height,
Beyond a boy's ambitions, manhood's dream,
Was lonely past belief, a tragic plight
Inescapable, and ready to blaspheme
All-worshipped Gods, a perfect anchorite
Cut off from men, Stylites it would seem
In the midst of armies. Solitude's their fate
Who steal Fate's privilege to predestinate

For others. Those two English ladies, coming
For a moment from a world like that he'd known,
Made him feel lonelier in the benumbing
Emptiness where he sate upon his throne,
Aware of abysses that there was no plumbing,
Without a comrade though never once alone.
The contrast 'twixt his fancy's overplus
And the facts made him feel ridiculous

In his own sight. Why must the hopeful spark
Die in all enterprises good or bad.
The raid when he had seized the motor-park
Had something glorious. But the victory had
Betrayed again. Strange workmen in the dark
Had damped the enthusiasm fierce and glad
Of that high venture. He felt supinely gravelled,
Seeing the skein that he had wrought unravelled.





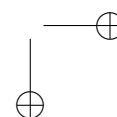
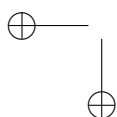
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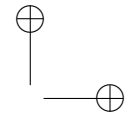
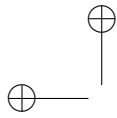
By subtle men a thousand miles away,
Who fenced against him with a viewless art,
Enemies he could not catch in open day,
Whose ends were epochs and continents apart
From his. Had he had objects? Cold dismay
At the inward question overcame his heart.
I wouldn't for a kingdom's price endure
The things he suffered in his prefecture.

The upshot was of course blank disillusion,
Contempt for colleagues irritable or blind,
Torment of the will, unspeakable confusion
And sense of incompleteness in his mind.
He sought within himself inner seclusion
He never was so fortunate as to find,
And lay at length in torpor hot and static,
Awaiting the denouement enigmatic,

That was suddenly leaping on him. Italy
Was marching to evict him with force and arms.
The loyal fleet was hovering far at sea,
Threatening. The city quaked with vague alarms.
There was sense of imminent catastrophe,
Which has for certain men peculiar charms,
Though not for Stelio, who saw upon the height
The hostile bivouacs. Would it be fight or flight?

Pio was Captain of the aerodrome.
He had got it up to date and spick and span.
A number of fleet planes were wont to roam
The skies above with no particular plan,
At eve returning obediently home,
Having seen naught to interest a man.
He had disciplined the greasy mechanics,
And all was in the pinkest of conditions.





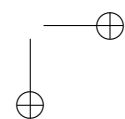
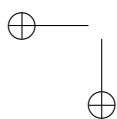
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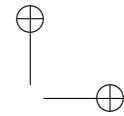
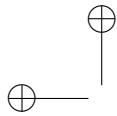
All things were in a posture of defence.
He had strung out machine-guns and barbed wire,
Planning with an intelligence intense
Entanglements and cognate zones of fire.
He was ready, as he thought for all events,
And, though he did not have the least desire
To die, or massacre compatriots,
Waited equanimous for the opening shots.

On that last night, ere from the heights descended
The approaching host, the legionaries met
In the great square. Anxiety had blended
With rage and resolution greater yet.
No more they bragged. Self-immolation splendid
Was in their eyes. Each man would pay the debt
He felt he owed. Stelio rose up to speak
Against the encroaching future harsh and bleak.

He lashed into that speech, as a snake lashes
At what it knows not. Fiercely he repeated
A hot pastiche of wild rhetorical flashes,
The last appeal to spirits undefeated.
With a final cadence of crescendo crashes
The crowd's enthusiastic heart he heated
To the ultimate maximum of white hot fury:
"Tomorrow! Te salutant morituri.

"Tomorrow! Tomorrow out of mine own land
"Myself I banish. I cut myself away
"From my own root, and with my proper hand.
"The ship of fortune shall no longer stay.
"There is no other fate that I demand.
"Only no longer let the storm delay."
Pio, as the myriad raised the loyal roar,
Thought vaguely he had heard all this before.





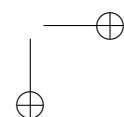
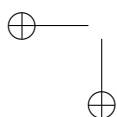
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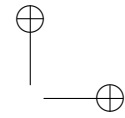
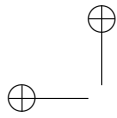
Was it at Rome? "Go build the city with blood."
The Ship's première of course! "We'll be the van
"That comes not back." That much he understood.
Stelio was an extraordinary man.
His ten-year-old tirade was now made good,
Spoken in earnest. Beat it if you can.
"March to the infinite confines ye who dare,
"And enter in death's kingdom unaware,

"My comrades. O my comrades!" Rose the yell
Of the Latin lashed to madness. All the square
Was wild with light and countenances fell,
Eyes flashing, furious fists clenched in the air.
Stelio looked at them. Broken was the spell
For him as he withdrew. Sable despair
Went home with him. What was it he had said?
He neither knew or cared. He went to bed.

At the unwitching hour of four A.M.
A rap came at his door. He had not slept.
In a panic which all soldiers must condemn
A legionary entered, whose inept
Scared face revealed a nature of small phlegm.
He screamed: "They've rushed the outposts. We have kept
"Them back a moment. They'll attack again.
"Hurry up, Sir. We have got out a plane."

They hurled him through the half-dark in a car
Out to the quiet aviation-field.
He could hear strange sounds of tumult, where afar
Drums battered and neurotic trumpets squealed.
The motor stopped with a wild shriek and jar
Of brakes. In the growing light there stood revealed
A ship with a bellowing motor. Men came hurrying
From all sides. At the field's edge groups were scurrying





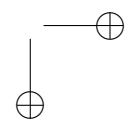
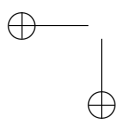
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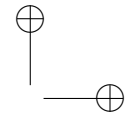
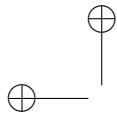
To organize some shadow of resistance.
How could one take this seriously? About
Men shouted strange things. At a deadly distance
He stood involved in overshadowing doubt.
Within him, with a curious insistence,
Clashing resolves that he could do without
Emphasized each other. Should he stay or go?
Which was the better? How was he to know?

He stood irresolute. To him a man dashed
With a vehement gesture, as the far dawn flushed
The hills. His world-scheme, it appeared, had crashed
Round him, yet he looked royal and uncrushed.
His voice like harsh resounding metal clashed.
It was Pio. To the dictator's cheek blood rushed,
As the man spat out with a resplendant curse:
"Don't play Iscariot to the Universe.

"Stay, and be damned! In any case, die! die!
"Die like the man you promised us you were.
"Defy these bloody swine and God on high!
"But don't escape like a degenerate cur.
"Do not —" He tumbled forward with a cry
Pathetic. Far off hummed a crackling whirr,
Machine-guns, talking to untoward ends
The only tongue all Europe comprehends.

Stelio sprang sidewise, which I too should do.
The bullet-stream stopped swiftly as it came.
Pio lay still. His spine was chopped in two.
His eyes had lost entirely their dull flame.
The desperate seconds to a minute grew.
Stelio felt ill. And name and fame and shame
Were lifeless things. The airplane motor roared.
The pilot yelled, "For Christ's sake get aboard."



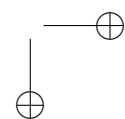
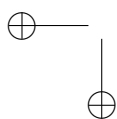


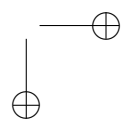
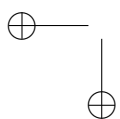
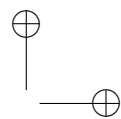
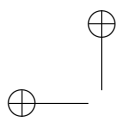
CANTO VII: FIASCO

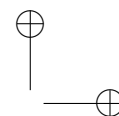
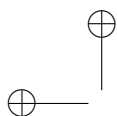
Automatically he swarmed in. Loud and more loud
The motor. They were moving. O'er the field
They battered. The bumping ceased. The great thing plowed
Suddenly its element. About it wheeled.
Fiume behind him, like a summer cloud,
Vanished. The motor's demon-laughter pealed
In the empty skies, monotonous demon-laughter
That seemed to mutter, "What of this hereafter?"

No answer. Three hours later down they dropped
In Ferrara's well appointed aerodrome.
The roaring metal its crepitation stopped.
An officer Stelio once had known at Rome
Looked wanly at him. The dictator mopped
His brow which was not hot, and sought to comb
His brain for metaphors which were not there,
Which might apply to the whole damned affair.

"We have won Fiume" (and the hate complete
Of sixteen millions). What was there to say?
There should be something fitting to repeat,
Some burning and appropriate cliché.
Pio, that idiot lying at his feet,
With his back broken, ready to decay!
Had there not been splendid moments? Aye, too splendid!
The fact was those too splendid times had ended.







CANTO VIII: EPILOGUE

This was a man born with thy face and throat, Lyric Apollo!
ἔστιν Θάλασσα, τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει;

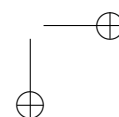
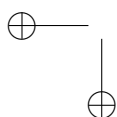
AGAMEMNON, 949
Aeschylus, 458 B.C.

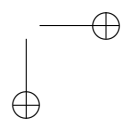
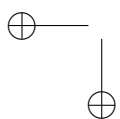
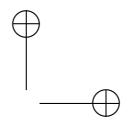
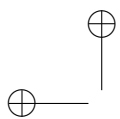
Expende Annibalem, quot libras in summo duce
Invenies?
Weigh Hannibal the conqueror of the earth.
How many lire is a duce worth?

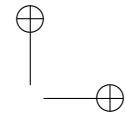
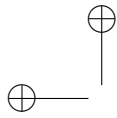
SATIRES
Juvenal

Patria! Il terribile e dolce nome chiamare voglio. Sono ebro.
Odo il tuono e il rombo. Chi mai sul Campidoglio percote lo
scudo raggiante?

CANTICO PER L'OTTAVA DELLA VITTORIA
G. d'Annunzio, 1918







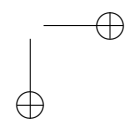
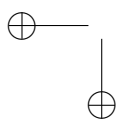
CANTO VIII: EPILOGUE

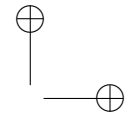
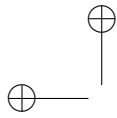
In Trascara Pio's widow read a note
Over and over, in a florid hand.
It praised her martyr's ardor to devote
His burning spirit to the Fatherland.
Its eloquence was something you could quote.
She read and read and could not understand:
"In the full splendor of his youth and pride,
"He perished like a hero at my side."

Prestige! the very word is like a bell.
Stelio, returned, knew hardly if, or how,
He had maintained it. Things were going well.
They would get Fiume. The transcendent row
He had made accomplished that. And time would tell.
But deep within him thought was troubled now.
He still had dragon-visions, but their wings
Had hard work to surmount the storm of things.

Something had burned once. Had strange cold allayed
That heat for ever? People whom he met
Listened respectfully, and yet they made
Him feel like one ignored. He had not yet
Cleared his mind on one point: Had he displayed
Great qualities that no one could forget?
Or was it merely theatre – bald appeal
To cheap emotion any fool can feel?

To Glauro Stelio seemed to have grown old,
To have outlived something, what were hard to say.
His mind no longer moved in the manifold
Exuberant and overwhelming way
Daniele had admired. A sort of cold
Rigor possessed him. The auroral play
Had faded. And Daniele's soul consumed
With fear that light could never be relumed.





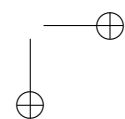
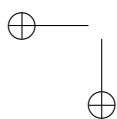
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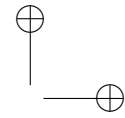
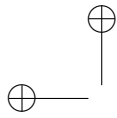
They were at Rome together. Stelio moved
Like an automaton through a daily scene
Of changeless routine definitely grooved.
Would today be what yesterday had been?
Spiritual commerce that Daniele loved
Was over. The laurels only lately green
Withered already. You felt it in the air,
Commingle triviality and despair

In the midst of the wild current of the time.
Rome lived a life of riots and of strikes.
All things were ripe for violence and crime.
Socialists gave a loose to their dislikes,
Now writing editorial tosh sublime,
Now knocking helpless officers off bikes.
In man's affairs there swirled a hideous tide,
And all the kindlier gods, it seemed, had died.

Yet Glauro saw, in fancy as it were,
Something enlarging in the spirit – a will
That was condemned to live, compelled to stir,
A hope nourished on itself, subsisting still
In secret power that Glauro could infer
But could not feel. He got his normal thrill
When, after weeks of desperate passivity,
His friend showed definite symptoms of activity.

To Stelio's villa men came sneaking in
You saw at a glance were soldiers, though they wore
Civilian clothes and the embarrassed grin
Of the inexperienced conspirator.
They met with Stelio secretly as sin.
Curiosity gnawed worm-like at the core
Of Glauro's soul. Stelio said noncommittally
That he had undertaken to save Italy,





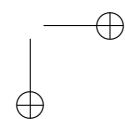
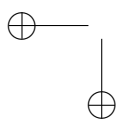
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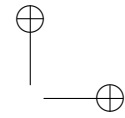
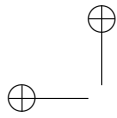
Which obviously stood much in need of saving
Just at the time. But how could it be done
In a world full of raving misbehaving
Proletarians? Glauro could not see for one,
And thought that he would perish of his craving
To get to the bottom of what was being done,
Also of desire, which we have seen before,
In some way to insert his proper oar.

But he was troubled by an invisible dread
Of something – you could not call it abnormality –
That, as the days passed, lifted up its head.
Stelio seemed like a man beyond reality,
Dreaming. The things he did, the things he said
Were of a sort to baffle a mentality
Like Glauro's. If he were about some coup
D'état, it was high time that his friend knew.

Glauro grieved too that Stelio was ignored
By forces that in a sense he had awaked.
They were young men who trusted in the sword.
Stelio should be of them. Glauro's spirit ached
To see his god's divinity restored.
He knew their thirst at other wells was slaked,
And that they were preparing for some rigorous
Test with a leader – more real and more vigorous,

The thief of Stelio's fire. The gods allowed
This rival and competing countersun.
Glauro shuddered thinking of the beast, black-browed,
White-eyed, who spoke when something had been done
Rather than before, crude, proud, direct, uncowed
With castor-oil and swifter maxim-gun
In his strange program. Glauro began to wonder,
Would the new power embezzle Stelio's thunder?





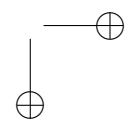
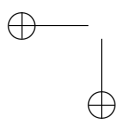
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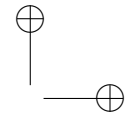
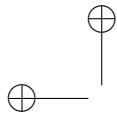
Could he bear a Stelio shrivelled in eclipse
Taking tea with duchesses? It must not be.
Merely to think it was scorpions and whips
On his very soul. Glauro's necessity
Demanded lightnings upon Stelio's lips.
That shackled spirit must struggle to get free,
Speak all emotion, all human splendor voice,
Express the world. There was no other choice

Than to be poet in the Capitol,
Crowned and triumphant, master of this fate,
A man to wonder at and to extol,
Beautiful and venerable and calm and great,
Verducci-like, superior in soul.
Verducci! simple, sincere – compassionate!
Thus Glauro, penetrating depths of dream.
So only Stelio could ransom and redeem

The life led so far, miserable sketch
Of what it should be, to fruition bring
Defeated buds, to consummation fetch
The glory and the promise of the spring.
Daniele felt tart resolution etch
His spirit. By God! he must achieve the thing.
But Stelio had another point of view.
“Glauro,” he said, “There’s something you might do.

“Get me in touch with this portentous man
“You talk of so. He ought to join my group.
“Seems well-intentioned. It may be I can
“Use him and his patriotic veteran troop.
“It will do no harm to write a rataplan
“For his drum-corps. He can ride upon our croup,
“Possibly help us when the moment’s ripe.
“All patriots can. He seems to be the type.”





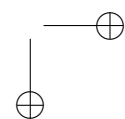
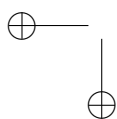
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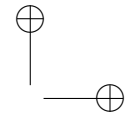
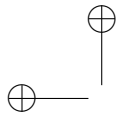
Daniele did it, and without delay,
Though a presentiment oppressed his mind,
That Stelio ought to take more time to weigh
An instrument peculiarly designed.
He found the man and knew not what to say,
Nor could he guess one thought that hid behind
The black brows and the eyes with the white rings
Of the coming master of contrasting things –

But the fellow came at once. That very night
In Stelio's salon he walked up and down.
His ebon pupils circled round with white
Glanced quickly here and there beneath the frown
Inquiring on his forehead. In polite
Silence he listened, or rather in a brown
Study, like one who claims his right to doubt
Till all points of a problem are worked out.

The moment that he entered Stelio knew him.
He was not impressive and almost undersized.
But looking at him Stelio felt shoot through him
Sharp recollection. Those features blackavized
And the unlooked-for look did queer things to him.
Gorizia! He had seen him agonized
Under a soldier-surgeon's knife accursed.
What if the rôles were going to be reversed?

Helpless and hurt the creature then had been
Equal to the hard moment. It appeared
He meant to play a part in this new scene,
Also to pluck occasion by the beard.
His heart was vigorous and his hands were clean
So far. And in a manner Stelio feared.
He wondered if he were equal to the test,
For the man at all costs had to be impressed.





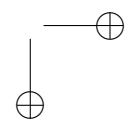
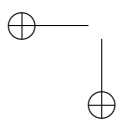
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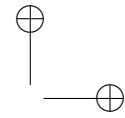
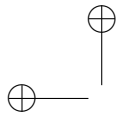
It was a scene which my mind dwells upon
Willingly, a great cinque-cento room
Hung with brocades. The poet hither and yon
Wandered, his medals gleaming in the gloom
On his Fiume regimentals. The blacksmith's son
Before him had perhaps lacked time to groom
Himself for the conference, something which implies
That he was busy. Stelio thought, 'Was it wise

'To wear my medals?' Odd solicitude
Grew in him as he viewed the protagonist.
'Here is a force, though it be rude and crude
'Apt to defeat whatever may resist.
'The imperative is visibly no mood
'To use with this chap.' Some subjunctive twist,
He felt, were likelier to do the trick.
Well time was passing and he must be quick.

And then he heard his own voice lifted aloud,
As with authority speaking to the man,
As if he were an army or a crowd.
The trope with which the exercise began
Seemed good. On wings of thunderous words he ploughed
The skies of thought, exhibiting a plan
That surely ought to win and captivate
The Italian mind, a vision of the state

Roman once more, although he quite implied
A literary Caesar on the throne
Or at least behind it: "Our men must not have died
"In vain. In a spiritual struggle lone
"A vision was vouchsafed me, how to guide
"Italy to that place which is her own."
The audience with extreme politeness listened.
His eyeballs, catlike, in the half-dark glistened.





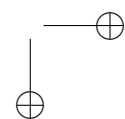
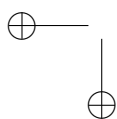
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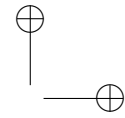
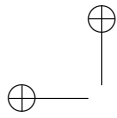
He did not interrupt or even applaud,
A circumstance which somehow disconcerted
The orator who desperately sawed
At his metaphorical wood-pile, and asserted
His thought more fiercely, as a cold fear gnawed
Within him that he had not yet converted
The listener, who at length remarked: "And you
"Intend to lead us? Sir, it will not do."

And that chill comment utterly put out
All pyrotechnics. The man, it seemed, could speak
For a hundred thousand shock-troops. He had no doubt,
And was therefore neither arrogant nor weak.
All Stelio's glittering dreams went up the spout
As the doer proceeded with outrageous check
To enlighten the dreamer, utterly outré,
As to the role it was hoped that he would play.

Which bore no semblance to the leading man's,
Rather a rather literary part,
Which should bring in line with the new party's plans
Music and science, poetry and art.
Stelio looked at him as an old bull scans
New talent. There was murder in his heart.
A bitter word trembled upon his tongue.
He bit it. The rival was too strong and young.

And, when Stelio sought to modify the scheme,
With a condign simplicity said, "No."
Whatever it was that had been Stelio's dream
Died in that moment with a shriek of woe.
Never for an instant altered the steady gleam
Of the wild young eyes. The man said what was so
And stuck to his point leech-like. That was that.
He was hard to handle, that embryo autocrat.





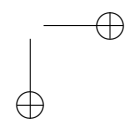
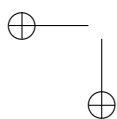
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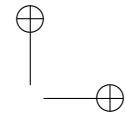
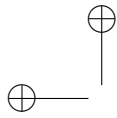
They parted without battle. The youngster said:
“Though we do not agree, it still is true
“That we have need of every heart and head
“That has the passion to feel and will to do.
“I count you of my faith, living or dead.
“And when the moment comes will send for you.”
Stelio was silent. He felt old and grey
And voiceless. Also what was there to say?

What was there to say? Just that the Gods at last
Write their denial large on the appeal
We hand them. He sat dumb and overcast,
Feeling wounded incapacity to feel.
Poetry? The time for that was overpast.
Politics? An unknown will of triple steel
Had barred that byway. A decaying fire
Was fading. Inner trumpets sobbed ‘Retire.’

All the books written at length – not worth the dreams
That came before them. And the deeds all done,
Imperfect copies of imperial schemes
Shrivelled and perverse under the wintry sun
Of his own thought, whose desultory gleams
Grew dull, hopes turning traitor one by one
Christ! he had lived for splendor and for art.
What was this aching of the brain and heart?

This aching of the brain? He swept his hand
Over his forehead. What was this morbid sweat
Upon it? Later he might understand
This anguish. But he would not try to yet.
Somehow he no longer seemed quite in command
Of his own mind. It was better to forget
Problems that taxed one, if one could not state
Their terms. Submit to fate! Submit to fate!





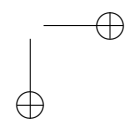
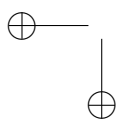
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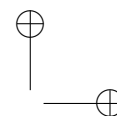
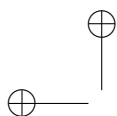
He thought all night about the interview
That had come to so uncomfortable an end.
But with the dawn a darker shadow grew
Up in his spirit which could not comprehend
Or face a checkmate. Sadly the evening drew
Toward him. It struck him that a female friend
Might soften a world that grew too hard for him.
In the Countess Qualchecosa's boudoir dim

He let it be observed that he was sad.
She had known the good old times, and had a keen
Intuition of people's feelings good or bad,
Also some inkling of this altering scene
Where we play out our parts. She likewise had
Kindness which on the whole has rarely been
An aristocratic virtue. She expressed
Herself distinctly: "Stelio, you need a rest."

"There's a place near Garda you'll get for an old song.
"It was some German's and was confiscated
"When the war came. The land runs right along
"Qualchecosa's boundary. When you've recreated
"Yourself a little, you'll be young and strong
"Once more. – Villa Schifanoia. You are frustrated
"In half your nature by sad circumstance.
"Surely the other half deserves its chance."

He brightened at the thought. He was so tired
Of the complicated web that Fortune varies.
Only peace at last – that was the goal desired –
And an end to the unfaithful luminaries
That had deceived him. Only to live retired
At Garda with his few true janissaries –
Sick of himself and Rome and jangling jars
He fled in several large staff-motor cars.





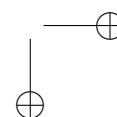
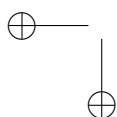
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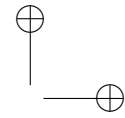
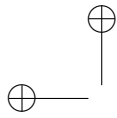
Northward they hummed along in the bright dawn.
Stelio in the foremost car seemed lost in thought.
Into some realm of fantasy withdrawn.
His henchmen let him be as henchmen ought.
After what he had lately undergone,
He had to look supremely overwrought,
And was genuinely so when in the Pass
Of Radicofani they ran out of gas.

Still he got forward, which I wish this tale
Would do, and reached Milan that very night,
And a hotel like a degenerate gaol.
The tiny lift creaked. Stelio wearied quite
Went down his corridor, where guttered pale
A blue and fitful lavatory-light.
A man, green-aproned, in the dubious glare,
Sate sleeping by the glass door in a chair.

His face was sad and old and in repose.
The lines about the mouth were like black cord.
A faint snore whickered from the vulgar nose.
The creature seemed more base because he snored.
Beside him boots and shoes in serried rows
Waited, dust-covered. Recognition bored
Through Stelio, as if a sudden poignard pricked.
'Tartaruga! Cleaning boots that once he'd licked.'

The révenant woke up. His flickering eye
Darted from Stelio. He saw that he was known,
Also by whom, and stifled a queer cry,
Surprised. There was pure misery in the tone
That seemed to say, "There is no remedy
'Why the devil can't you leave a wretch alone?'
Yet he spoke with the shadow of his ancient leer,
"I suppose you know the Foscarina's here."





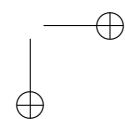
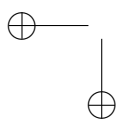
CANTO VIII: EPILOGUE

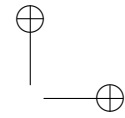
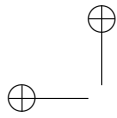
They glanced at each other like two veteran cats,
Reciprocally contemptuous and censorious,
Elderly failures grounded on the flats
Of fate, each seeing qualities inglorious
In the other and himself. The spirit that's
The force of life had ceased to rule victorious
In either. Tartaruga's barren eyes
Turned gold to dross, achievement into lies

Told by an idiot, nothing signifying,
Staled by events that no man can control.
Sorrow and anger rose up, strangely crying
In the desert Stelio once had called his soul,
A horrible voice inexorably denying
All birth of beauty or truth, or any goal.
Must Tartaruga know a like bereavement,
Looking on his face, who once had known achievement?

Tartaruga spoke again: "I have cleaned shoes
"In this hotel – ever since I – retired.
"One has followed your career. Mars and the Muse
"Doubtless provided much that you desired.
"As for me, let's say ten lire. I can use
"The money. Such a lot has been required
"Of me that long ago I lost my pride.
"Verducci sent me money till he died.

"Even Rode used to tip me when he went
"Through the city every autumn. He's dead too.
"He'd a fine place, they say. An insolent
"Swine. He suspected me and ruffled you,
"I thought. As for his villa, the government
"Has seized it – something governments will do
"To the unlucky. He was, of course, a German
"And had no rights – like me and other vermin.





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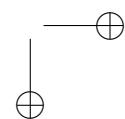
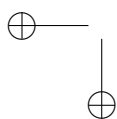
“The Foscarina’s here. She’s old and ill
“Like me – No! – not like me. It’s queer to speak
“With you at all. And I can see you still
“As at that dinner. This isn’t meant for cheek,
“But I kept thinking, ‘There’s a boy who will
“ ‘Do something.’ Yet perhaps you, too, were weak
“Where you seemed strongest. Shall I switch on the light?”
“At eight o’clock, sir? Thank you, sir. Good night.”

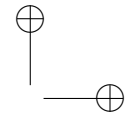
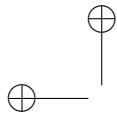
.

So he had found her. He could not regard
The circumstance easily. In her sitting-room
He kissed her hand. The long years evil-starred
Had altered her to a new creature whom
He had never known. To know a woman’s hard.
Her look was friendly, but she did not bloom
Forth into welcome. Her voice was gentle and low:
“I had forgotten you so long ago.”

He looked at her, the divine instrument
That had been eternally taken from his hand.
Remembrance like a harsh wind through him went
Of emotion that could never get command
Over his nature, and died ere the event,
Of self-surrenders he could not understand,
Sacrifices offered, and the world well lost,
But not by him. Eclipsing shadow crossed

The sun obscurely, a descending night.
Had he lost the past only to be divorced
From the future he had clung to? In its own sight
The tyrannic self, so glibly that discoursed
Aforetime, dwindled. Fear rose in him that might
O’ertax a brain no longer reinforced
By confidence. O for fierce self-deceit
To deaden the conviction of defeat!





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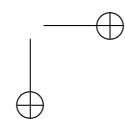
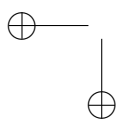
How could she be so calm who had known emotion,
While he who had known so little was troubled so?
Did they drink divinity, who drain her potion,
That they who have refused it cannot know.
He tried to speak, but awkwardness Boeotian
Paralysed the phrase and robbed it of all glow.
The sentiment seemed good. She could see through
That poor banality. That at least he knew.

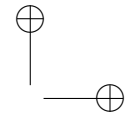
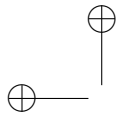
“If it did not touch you, how are you at fault?”
She asked, her voice as ever gentle and low.
The question seemed a murderous assault
Upon his nature, and the ultimate blow
That made all spiritual process halt,
As he glimpsed regions he could never know.
Again she spoke, and her voice pierced the brain.
“It is not tragic. One outlives such pain.”

He could not know that she was going to die
In three months, by the practice of a Jew
Producer, in Pittsburgh. The moments trickled by.
There was no more to say, nothing to do.
Their last encounter did not satisfy
More than their first. Bitterly he withdrew.
Half-conscious of a darkening height of shame.
‘Good God! And must the woman bear no blame?’

The Foscarina, as the door swung to,
Made a gesture as of one, with empty hands,
Emphasizing emptiness. A book she knew
Was on the table. Like one who understands
She read the slender volume through and through,
With the face of one who has answered all demands.
She marked one line between a smile and frown:
“The wing of desire has fallen frozen down.”

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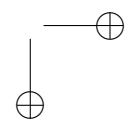
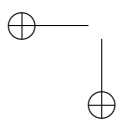
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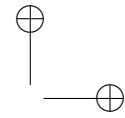
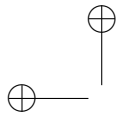
In the street Stelio's flock of motor-cars
Snorted. They left the city with a roar.
'Forget, like her, these miseries and scars!'
There were the ice-blue Alps towering before,
That no contemptible emotion mars.
'One must be master of one's self once more.'
Evening came on. They halted at a gate.
Villa Schifanoia! "Property of the State,"

The concierge stuttered. "So much the better then.
"I am Stelio Effrena." And he marched in
With all his retinue of arméd men.
It was a lovely place, far from the din
Of highways, o'er a cypress-glooming glen.
In the lake one saw its paradisal twin
Mirrored in stillness. The house was fair and roomy.
Stelio annexed it like another Fiume.

The doddering care-taker switched on a light.
Stelio beheld a vast room walled with brown –
Backed books and pictures, which even at first sight
One knew were done by ancients of renown.
A modern portrait, whose color seemed too bright
By contrast, from the mantel-piece stared down.
It was a man's whose character sardonic
Had been hit off with artistry demonic.

And Stelio felt the same disquiet strike,
That the living man had once inspired in him,
Suggestion of an attitude unlike
Those that he knew, a commentary grim
On him and his. He felt some beastly psych-
ological discomfort, deep and dim.
Rode, that dilettante underground,
Still made him feel uncertain and unsound.





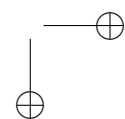
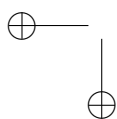
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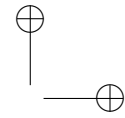
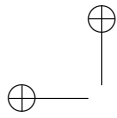
For Rode that strange girl in Paris had
Mocked him. She was dead too, beneath the wheels
Of her own motor. Things like that were sad.
But he had not forgiven those wild peals
Of mirth for Rode's sake. It made him mad.
The mere look of the portrait broke the seals
Of the phials of a fossil rage. The face
Made him feel furious and commonplace –

The right contemptuous leer, as if by chance,
Somewhere, somehow, it had perhaps perceived
Something unknown to Stelio's ignorance.
He glared at that fixed insolence unrelieved.
Impassive it returned the savage glance.
And Stelio's tongue to his hard palate cleaved
With a dry anger. Still it could be said
He had the villa and the man was dead.

He had it. He was taken by the place
As by no other. He found a very balm
And anodyne, a healing and a grace
Half-feminine in the beauty and the calm.
His pulse of desperation slowed its pace.
The Bedouin who sees a genuine palm
Amid mirage, and tastes true water-springs,
Knows no more fine relief from lying things

That have mocked him in the waste. A huge release
Made every cypress in the garden dear.
Had he at length found out a haunt of peace?
And would the mists that fogged his spirit clear?
And the harvest of the soul at length increase?
Would he learn at length to capture quiet here?
Not to remember, and perhaps forget?
And Beauty? Might there not be Beauty yet?





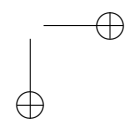
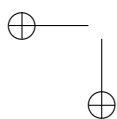
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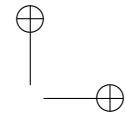
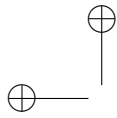
Some six weeks passed. But they were not weeks of stillness
Once more he felt that he had been let down.
He felt indefinite and inward illness
That made all studies an unpleasant brown,
Worse than habitual and familiar chillness
Of thought. Upon the morning's face a frown
Gloomed ominous. The world had a bad tone.
Alone he heard it. Yet was he alone?

He could not be sure of that. There was no ghost
That walked the corridors. It was in his mind
That the thing stirred. It frightened him almost.
He felt like one who is afraid to find
Certain damnation in the morning post.
How could there be a presence lurking behind
The troubled spirit? Dining with his men,
Why it was nothing. Why did he feel it then?

No! Not a presence – rather presences.
He found himself addressing them aloud,
Haranguing or commanding entities
That overcame him like a summer's cloud,
And vanished like one. He saw the lake, the trees,
Between them. But the visionary crowd,
Soon as his thought into itself withdrew,
Behind the mind were whispering anew.

They were faceless, graceless, spaceless. They were there.
They filled all shadows. And the shadows grew.
They came between him and the very air
He breathed, a voiceless unsubstantial crew
Emerging from abysses God knew where,
Peopling the void, unknown, and yet he knew
Something familiar he had ruled or cowed
Aforetime. Was it the phantom of the crowd,





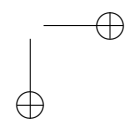
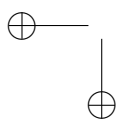
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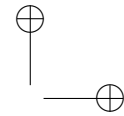
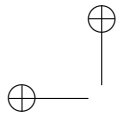
Once all in all to him, which was the reflection
He sought, of himself, when action of his brain
Could give to human things shape and direction?
Now he was conscious of the crowd again,
This time in solitude and in dejection,
A crowd within, which nothing could restrain.
The thing he called himself seemed to be lost
'Mid many shadows, perpetually that crossed

Each other's paths and his. It was like drowning.
And he was growing aware of a profound
Too deep to plumb. The thought of it, discrowning
The beauty of life, with novel horror crowned
All thought whatever. The dimness settled frowning
At noonday. What worth sunlight, if one drowned
Like this in the wide gleam, and felt the night
Wavelike above, beneath, and left and right?

There is some inner darkness of the star,
Premonitory how the outer glare
Must vanish, whose transplendent nenuphar
Of light has made the circling planets fair
For aeons, and all lovely things that are.
One must learn to love that darkness, or despair
Will leap upon us, miserable ones,
Nourished by the dry-rotting of the suns.

Through the increasing shadow Glauro came,
As ever faithful and as ever kind.
He guessed disaster that he could not name,
And was afraid, and not entirely blind.
This hopeless Stelio must relume the flame –
That was too clearly smothering in the mind,
Emerge from this seclusion, play a rôle,
Strengthen the spirit, make muscular the soul





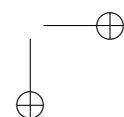
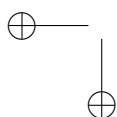
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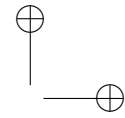
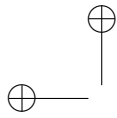
In some endeavor. "Be our man once more!
"Speak our thought for us! Show us again the way!
"Ride the wing'd horse into the burning core
"Of action. Do not suffer this decay
"Of spirit. We must wage a sterner war
"Within us and without us. So we may
"Deal with the dreadful problem that confronts
"The future." Stelio said, "At Fiume once —,"

And paused as if bewildered. A man came in
With a telegram, saluted and departed.
It seemed as if there were a vapor thin
'Twixt Stelio and the paper. Glauro started.
He felt a dangerous prickling of the skin
Coupled with hopeless pity tender-hearted.
Did Stelio see the sentence he had read
Apparently? Glauro's spirit in him bled,

As the poet, like a listless mechanism,
Reached him the wire. Daniele cocked an eye
Over a prophecy of cataclysm
About to darken the Italian sky,
An appeal to Stelio's nerve and patriotism:
"We march on Rome tomorrow, win or die."
Daniele silently began to thank
His maker. Stelio's eye was coldly blank

For an instant. Then a shocking nightmare spasm
Possessed it. He bit his words short. His voice broke
Pulsating with an inordinate orgasm
Of rage. "Do you see?" he gulped. And as he spoke
His gesturing hands summoned some vast phantasm.
Much as magicians by their arts evoke
Illusion. Glauro started at the glare.
It was hard to think that there was nothing there.





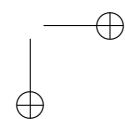
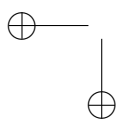
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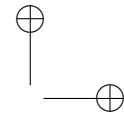
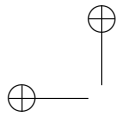
“Look at them, Glauro. They are mad, mad, mad,
“I tell you, Glauro, mad as fools can be.
“The imbeciles. But the dream that I have had
“Protects me. They shall never conquer me,
“Nor shall their chief, that white-eyed politic cad.
“For I shall triumph, Glauro. You shall see.
“I have always known the thing that you required,
“My triumph! You shall have what you desired.

“Do you not hear the voices? Do you not hear?
“Glauro, the wreath is on my head at last.
“How the crowd grows! They are thronging far and near.
“Look, Glauro, look! Why are you so down-cast?
“Here there is nothing for a man to fear.”
He dropped in a chair as the neurotic blast
Of energy slacked. His cyclops eye-ball whirled:
“Make the prow strong, and sail to front the world.

“My triumph! My triumph! My triumph! Whose but mine?
“Crowned and triumphant in the Capitol,
“Drunken at last with the sacramental wine
“Of the spirit, pulsing to the throb and roll
“Of inner music. I hear it the divine
“Inner music –,” His eye seemed quenched, “O Christ! My
soul!
“My soul! My soul!” Like one who sees disaster,
He wheeled on Glauro with a shriek, “Non basta.”

Daniele stared at the splitting warp and woof
That the Fates had determined to unweave,
Like one at once incredulous and aloof.
Was this the end he had striven to achieve?
This gibbering? He could not face the proof.
But what is faith for, if we must believe
In evidence? His heart went sick with pain.
The loathsome storm blew out in Stelio’s brain,





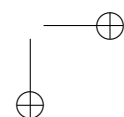
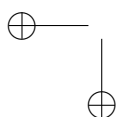
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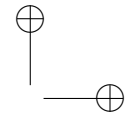
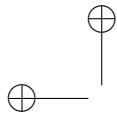
Daniele cannot tell how the next day
Whether it were by force or fraud and sleight
He got an unknown man to go away
From a place grown horrible in Glauro's sight.
"We'll motor. To Trascara, let us say."
Stelio at length gave his consent polite,
Like one who must accommodate a rotter
And ordered up an imperial Isotta.

With the first jangling of the changing gears
His face grew cloudless, as, after week-long rain,
A Tuscan sky, which of a sudden clears.
Daniele thought he was himself again,
Whatever that might mean, and all the years,
Whether of endured or of inflicted pain,
Fallen away. The motor with a fine
Defiance roared through the green Apennine.

The towns they clamored through seemed strangely still.
The women weaving straw at every door
Sate silent, as oppressed by coming ill,
When the motor passed them with its musical roar.
From the summit of a gorse-embroidered hill
They saw a portent on a valley-floor,
A writhing river of men, in triple line,
Marching toward Rome, singing of youth divine,

That is of very beauty spring of the year.
On they came tramping in their threefold files
Firm in belief that had forgotten fear
And fate that mocks and fortune that beguiles,
And great beginnings that must disappear.
Triumphing they marched the white victorious miles.
And the dust smoked above them o'er the plain
That had risen for Caesar and for Charlemagne.





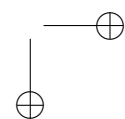
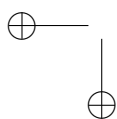
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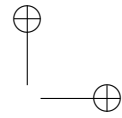
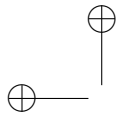
To Glauro the blanched road became a groove
That he must follow, whereso'er it led,
Part of fatality that he must prove,
Clear as a fixed idea in the head,
Which no amount of reasoning can remove.
All the day along across the land they fled,
Traversing the dark hosts that swept along
Southward, for ever bellowing their song.

The new macadam, a ribbon up the slope,
Wound through a chestnut forest. The sun sank
Behind the ridges in an envelope
Of chocolate cloud, of which the upper bank
Went suddenly scarlet as a cardinal's cope,
And drifts of mist above them, weft and hank.
It was almost dark, but, as they stormed the height,
They came once more into a world of light

The hills above Trascara! Fate or whim
Laid hold on Stelio. The motor scaled the grade
Like a dragon. On the Adriatic's rim
Fantastic isles that presently would fade
Loomed in the evening. It seemed good to him
To leave the car. Across the heath he strayed,
Aimless. His shadow fell before him down
Like a pointer. A light quivered in the town.

The drug-store! Words came trembling to his lips
And died there. He had stood there long ago
In sunlight. But that sun was in eclipse.
Something he had wished to say, but did not know
What it could or might have been. He had been at grips
With undefeatable things. Was it not so?
But here was poetry once. It was gone now
A cool dusk settled on the mountain-brow.





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And in the East it darkened o'er the deep
He had passed over on great ships with wings.
The bitter silence that began to creep
Was like the hurt that haunts defeated kings.
Waking was done, and there must come a sleep
The end appointed of all mortal things,
And night descending, terrible and tender.
Nox est perpetua una dormienda.

But under Roman arc-lights shouting men
Marched past the secret palaces and domes.
Triumphant thoughts had swum into their ken,
Visions of the most fantastical of Romes.
With their song eternal echoes woke again.
The city trembled to the catacombs.
It will not serve to praise them or condemn.
There also is perpetual night for them.

