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# DANTE, BRITISH EPIC AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION

*William Hayley's Eighteenth-Century Appropriation of the Commedia*

**ABSTRACT:** In eighteenth-century Great Britain the *Divine Comedy* took an active part in literary discussions on genre (epic poetry) as well as on gender (women and education). To discuss this role, I will examine in particular William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), a poem which draws on Dante's *Commedia* to produce for English literature a new kind of heroic poetry featuring "female excellence;" and his *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782), a scholarly essay which introduces the *Commedia* as an epic model and includes a translation of *Inferno* I-III in *terza rima*.

**KEYWORDS:** Dante, *Divine Comedy*, William Hayley, *The Triumphs of Temper*, Epic poetry, Eighteenth-century British Culture, Translation.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is widely recognized as exerting a strong influence on English literature and culture<sup>1</sup>, though many would be surprised to learn that the average reader in Great Britain was quite unfamiliar with both Dante and his *Commedia* throughout most of the eighteenth century. The earliest attempts to translate the *Divine Comedy* into English start in the eighteenth century in conjunction with a gradual recognition of Dante as a canonical author (early 1800s): the partial renderings of Jonathan Richardson (1719), Thomas Gray (1737-40), Lord Carlisle (1772), William Hayley (1782), Charles Rogers (1782), William Parsons (1785), and Henry Constantine Jennings (1798); and the complete versions of Henry Boyd (1802) and Henry Francis Cary (1805-1814).

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<sup>1</sup> Dante's *Divine Comedy* made its first appearance in Great Britain in the guise of a short imitation in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1380-82). Chaucer also first paraphrased the Ugolino episode in the *Monk's Tale*. Since then, the *Commedia* has been appropriated by a considerable number of British poets: Edmund Spenser, John Milton, the Romantics, T.S. Eliot—to name only a few of those who have offered visions of Dante's poem in English. See "Nachleben" (Gagnolati et al. 2021).

For eighteenth-century British intellectuals the *Commedia* became a sort of object, a collector's item brought back from the Grand Tour<sup>2</sup>. It signified not only economic capital to acquire, possess, and trade (manuscripts of the *Commedia* and works of art which it inspired, including drawings, pictures and prints)<sup>3</sup>, but also cultural capital, a literary artifact to read, translate, discuss, and appropriate. The *Divine Comedy* could be used to represent, for instance, certain innovative tenets of an artist's belief-system: Jonathan Richardson the elder (1665-1745), in his wish to resist the dominant cultural agenda and raise the status of English painting, produced the first English translation of considerable length of the *Divine Comedy*, choosing the Ugolino episode because of its representation in a statue allegedly by Michelangelo<sup>4</sup>. Most importantly, the *Commedia* gradually became for British scholars a sort of literary capital comparable to a Greek or Latin classic and was circulated by them to reshape and subvert contemporary poetics. I will illustrate that in eighteenth-century Britain the *Divine Comedy* took an active part in literary discussions on genre (epic poetry) as well as on gender (women and education). To discuss this role, I will examine in particular William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), a poem which draws on Dante's *Commedia* to produce for English literature a new kind of heroic poetry featuring "female excellence";

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<sup>2</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century the growing British interest in Italian literature and Dante was partly stimulated by the Grand Tour (Doughty 1950, 125). (By the early eighteenth-century antiquarianism had become a common pastime in Great Britain [Woolf 1992, 7]). Before departing Great Britain for Italy, tourists were advised to acquaint themselves with its language, and so some travelers began to read and study Italian literature. Once on site, tourists would visit such literary places as Dante's tomb in Ravenna or his tower of famine in Pisa. Returning to Great Britain, artists brought back not only ideas, but also books, drawings, pictures, prints, and statues.

<sup>3</sup> Dante was essentially 'rediscovered' in eighteenth-century Great Britain largely thanks to an Italian sculpture representing the Ugolino episode—allegedly by Michelangelo—which was brought to England in 1700 and inspired Jonathan Richardson to produce the *Commedia*'s first substantial version into English. Also, Italian manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy* played an important role in the recognition of Dante in eighteenth-century Great Britain. English travelers, among them Thomas Coke (1697-1759) and Anthony Askew (1722-1774), transported several copies to their country. The former purchased for the library at Holkham six manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy* in 1716-1718 (DEL 1909, I: 195). DEL is used in this article as an abbreviation of Toynbee's *Dante in English Literature*.

<sup>4</sup> In his *Essay on the Art of Criticism* (Richardson 1719), Richardson juxtaposed several renderings of the Ugolino episode: Giovanni Villani's *Florentine History* (where the story of Count Ugolino was thoroughly described in prose), poetry (his own translation of Dante's Ugolino episode), sculpture (the bas-relief of Ugolino brought to England in 1700 by the historical painter Henry Trench and attributed to Michelangelo but more probably by Pierino da Vinci), and a hypothetical painting. After this comparison of various media, Richardson maintained that there is a scale of arts which leads from history to poetry and then moves upward to sculpture and painting (*Works of Jonathan Richardson*, 187).

and his *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782), a scholarly essay which introduces the *Commedia* as an epic model and includes a translation of *Inferno* I-III in *terza rima*.

### *The Triumphs of Temper and the Commedia*

Hayley first dealt with the *Divine Comedy* in his most successful work, the poem *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781). Although today's critics hardly mention his works, Hayley was an influential literary critic and patron, and a popular poet for at least two or three decades. His *Triumphs of Temper* underwent twenty-four publications between 1781 and 1817, with American editions and a German translation. Due to his celebrity and the fact that he was a recognized poet (unlike previous translators of Dante), Hayley played a major role in the literary rediscovery of the Medieval poet in Great Britain and in the interpretation of his *Commedia*.

Hayley appropriated the *Commedia* to re-energize the British epic, a literary genre in decline in his day. Hayley opened his Preface to *The Triumphs of Temper* with an emphasis on what he saw as a common task of those who undertake poetry: "to raise, if possible, the dignity of a declining art, by making it as beneficial to Life and Manners as the limits of composition, and the character of modern times . . . allow" (iii). Hayley later acknowledged his desire to produce a new type of epic poem, moving somewhat away from previous English models of hero-comic works like Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), and partially embracing Italian epics like Ariosto's and Dante's<sup>5</sup>. Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* had used the high stature of classical epics to emphasize the triviality of a minor incident and satirize the lifestyle led by some people of his time. It owed its pathos, in part, to the unresolved ambivalence of its protagonist Belinda and her surrounding world, beautiful but with shallow values (Tinkler-Villani 1989, 79). In contrast, in *The Triumphs of Temper* Hayley portrayed a perfect heroine, Serena, who, after going through a journey similar to the one undertaken by Dante the pilgrim in the *Commedia*, learns to manage her temper and to reject artificial relations and trivial pleasures. Following the trend of many eighteenth-century fictions, Serena's excellence will in the end be rewarded with a wedding to a wealthy, handsome and beloved young man. From this perspective, Dante's poem brought two major contributions to British

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<sup>5</sup> In his Preface Hayley wrote, "There is another point, in which I have also attempted to give this Poem an air of novelty: I mean, the manner of connecting the real and the visionary scenes, which compose it; by shifting these in alternate Cantos, I hoped to make familiar Incident and allegorical Picture afford a strong relief to each other, and keep the attention of the Reader alive, by an appearance particularly diversified. I wished, indeed (but I fear most ineffectually) for powers to unite some touches of the sportive wildness of Ariosto, and the more serious sublime painting of Dante, with some portion of the enchanting elegance, the refined imagination, and the moral graces of Pope" (ix).

culture: the visionary journey to three realms of the *Commedia* provided Hayley's *Triumphs of Temper* a setting where real and visionary worlds are connected in alternate cantos (respectively Canto I, II, IV VI, and Canto III and V)<sup>6</sup>; and it also supplied a useful narrative structure for presenting a female character moving toward a model of moral excellence. The former was more innovative in literary terms while the latter conformed to eighteenth-century patriarchy, but the two were nonetheless interdependent, as I show in the following paragraphs.

In eighteenth-century Great Britain, several literati discussed epic, its significance and the possibility of writing one in that age. Horace Walpole, for instance, who was opposed to epic, considered it “the art of being as long as possible in telling an uninteresting story . . . a mixture of history without truth, and of romance without imagination” (*DEL* 1909, 1: 339-40). Dante's *Commedia* became part of this debate, especially because of its hybrid and irregular form. In his *Essay upon the Epick Poetry of the Modern European Nations* (1727), Voltaire, whose work was very influential in eighteenth-century Great Britain, had criticized Dante and denied the status of epic poet to all Italian writers with the possible exceptions of Trissino and Tasso (*Dictionnaire philosophique* 38: 4; 39: 224-29; 40: 58-59). Dante was criticized in Great Britain not only for violating all acceptable standards of reason, decorum and taste, but also for deviating from the classical standards of epic poetry. An epic is traditionally a long narrative poem in dactylic hexameter, set in an age of heroes, characterized by unity of action and told in elevated style. The journey of Dante the pilgrim in the *Commedia* can be seen as an expansion of the classic *katabasis*, where the hero visits the realm of the dead. Although Homer's hero Odysseus does tell of his own otherworldly journey and encounter with the dead in the *Odyssey*, the religious pilgrim Dante transgresses Aristotle's precepts which forbid extensive participation of the narrator in the epic poem and progressive evolution of character<sup>7</sup>. Dante's emphasis on subjectivity transgressed Neoclassical rules, but at the same time appealed to emergent Romanticism.

The many objections to the epic format of the *Commedia* did not deter the attention and appreciation of British and Italian scholars like Joseph Warton and Giuseppe Baretti<sup>8</sup>. In his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756), Warton praised Dante for

<sup>6</sup> The *Commedia* was appropriated by Hayley as a vision. Such an interpretation of Dante's work was cherished in seventeenth-century Italy, where two of the three editions of the *Divine Comedy* were called *La visione* (1613, 1629).

<sup>7</sup> John Freccero has pointed out that the *Commedia*'s subjective narration recalls that of St. Augustine's *Confession* (1986, 1-28).

<sup>8</sup> Though we do not have many publications or critical studies of his poem in seventeenth-century Italy, Dante influenced many Italian epic works of the time in terms of citations and memorable images, and

his “sublimity” and “originality,” and characterized the *Commedia* as “a kind of satirical epic . . . which abounds in images and sentiments almost worthy of Homer.”<sup>9</sup> The Italian Baretti called Dante “one of our epic poets, who hath been always read and admired amongst us” (*DEL* 1909, 1: 257).

After moving to Great Britain in 1751, Baretti used Dante’s *Commedia* as an example to contradict Voltaire’s general criticism of Italian literature as feminine for an alleged lack of strength and virility. (At this time, Italian literary works were regarded by some as effeminate, also because Italian, as a language closely associated with music, was thought by many to belong to the woman’s sphere). In *A Dissertation Upon the Italian Poetry*, Baretti opposed this general attitude:

I have cited [and translated into English] these passages of Dante [the Ugolino episode], not only to give the English reader, who is not acquainted with him in the original, some idea of his poetry; but also, to show him that the Italian is falsely accused of *effeminacy* by Mr Voltaire, or rather by those from whom he has humbly copied this opinion. (emphasis mine, *DEL* 1909, 1: 262-63)

Baretti did not reject the Neoclassical dichotomy of masculine versus feminine literature, the latter located outside the legitimate realm of authorship<sup>10</sup>. Rather, he attempted to prove that Italian literature was effeminate neither in content nor form by citing examples from Dante’s work. Generally, the *Commedia* was seen as ‘feminine’ because of its emotional and irregular qualities. The Ugolino episode, a brutal story about the cruel death from hunger of a father, his male children and grandchildren, was thought by Baretti to have instead a rough and masculine character. Also, in Baretti’s opinion, Dante’s verses and language were masculine because their sound could seem “strong and sonorous” even to an audience which did not know Italian (*DEL* 1909, 1: 263). In conclusion, the Italian scholar extended this judgement to the rest of the *Inferno*, affirming that the thirty-four cantos of Dante’s *Hell* were composed “with more virility of thought and vigour of style than any other poem ancient or modern” (*DEL* 1909, 1: 263).

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as a model for journeys to the Otherworld. See Marco Arnaudo, *Dante barocco. L’influenza della Divina Commedia su letteratura e cultura del Seicento italiano*.

<sup>9</sup> With the label “satire,” Warton especially referred to *Inferno*’s political invectives, grim humor and grotesqueness (*DEL* 1909, 1: 301-302). Many eighteenth-century critics, both Italian and British, saw the *Commedia* as a sort of satire. For instance, in *Dell’ipocrisia dei letterati* (1714), Giuseppe Maria Bianchini presented Dante as the first Italian satirist (Pietropaolo 1989, 282-318). And in *New Observations on Italy and Its Inhabitants* (1769), Thomas Nugent described the *Commedia* as “a downright satire on the government and its principal members, and a *caricatura* of the manners of his compatriots of both sexes” (*DEL* 1909, 1: 250).

<sup>10</sup> Laura Runge has written an exhaustive study on the use of the adjectives “masculine” and “feminine” in British literary criticism, pointing out that “gender is a constitutive element of eighteenth-century literary criticism” (1997, 3).

The general reading public in Britain, having no *Inferno* in English, would have to rely on Baretto's opinion.

While Baretto was valiantly trying to defend Italian literature and Dante in particular from the charge of being effeminate, the British literary world saw a revaluation of the feminine (but not of women).<sup>11</sup> Terry Eagleton has directed our attention to the "feminization of discourse" in eighteenth-century novels, which featured women as main characters and attracted a large female reading audience (1982, 13). Also, Laura Rosenthal has pointed out that in the eighteenth century the concept of genius "changed from something one could have to something one could be" (1996, 19). In the Romantic period, the critic continues, "the emotional capacity expected of women could potentially signify genius in men" (*ibid.* 19). Following this wave, in 1795 William Roscoe recognized the adjective "feminine" as a positive quality to attribute to Dante. In his *Life of Lorenzo De Medici*, Roscoe quoted, with approval, Andres' characterization of Dante's *Commedia*, Petrarch's sonnets, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* as "three little books written for the purposes of satire, of gallantry, and of feminine amusement, [from which] we are to trace the origin of learning, and true taste in modern times" (*DEL* 1909, 1: 527). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Dante's *Commedia*, Italian culture and Italy itself began to be appropriated by the British Gothic as elements of melodramatic sentimentality and the *Divine Comedy* became a sort of new classic for Gothic literature, a source for those promoting a different kind of writing.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Triumphs of Temper*, Hayley connected Dante's *Commedia* with the genre and gender discourses of his time. The poem, as pointed out earlier, draws heavily from the visionary structure of the *Commedia* by featuring a female protagonist, Serena, who visits Hell, part of Purgatory and Paradise, accompanied by the fair Sophrosyne (who plays the role of Dante's Virgil in Hayley's poem)<sup>13</sup>. What is noteworthy is that Hayley the writer does not participate in the poem as a character as Dante did; he describes Serena objectively, thus erasing the prophetic layer of the *Commedia*. Also, and most importantly for this study, Hayley substitutes important male figures, Dante the pilgrim, Virgil and God, with females, Serena, Sophrosyne and a goddess. In his *Essay on Epic Poetry*, the British writer emphasized the need of having women as poets and as subjects

<sup>11</sup> Christine Battersby observes that although there was a revaluation of the emotional and the feminine in literature, women were still rewarded for being domesticated and obedient (1989, 82).

<sup>12</sup> See the use of the *Divine Comedy* in Gothic novels like William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Moreover, Italy provided a favorite geographical and historical background for many Gothic writers including Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe.

<sup>13</sup> Hayley represented only the last level of Purgatory, earthly Paradise, which is understandable given the fact that the British poet was a Protestant and Protestants did not embrace the idea of redemption during the afterlife.

of heroic literature (75), a literary *desideratum* which undoubtedly participated in the “feminization of discourse” in eighteenth-century literature mentioned earlier. However, I believe one should also consider another Dantean element, the story of Francesca, which undoubtedly influenced Hayley’s choice and description of his female character Serena, as is clear from *The Triumphs of Temper* itself and from the general interpretation of *Inferno V* by contemporary literati.

In eighteenth-century Great Britain the Francesca episode, Canto V, was mentioned and translated on more than one occasion.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Henry Constantine Jennings rendered Canto V and privately printed it together with a version of the Ugolino episode in 1794, and republished it in 1798 in *Cursory Remarks on Infancy and Education*. In his adaptation of Canto V, Jennings emphasized the pedagogical value of Dante’s historical cautionary tale.<sup>15</sup> The Francesca episode is, in many aspects, a retelling of the Fall of Man. In eighteenth-century Britain the Fall gave the primary religious explanation for a woman’s subordination to man (Davidoff and Hall 1987, 114). Francesca, who committed a mistake comparable to that of her foremother Eve, displayed a female weakness which could be cited to promote subordination of women in eighteenth-century society. In this sense, its translation by Jennings was undoubtedly welcomed by English patriarchy<sup>16</sup>. In a society influenced by Puritan values, sexual integrity and marriage were major requirements, and there was an increasing need for publications promoting proper conduct by women and the “regulation of desire” (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987, 12). In addition, by providing in a footnote to his translation a fairly

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<sup>14</sup> The first rendering of *Inferno V* appeared in prose in Thomas Warton’s *The History of English Poetry* (1774-81), and in poetry in the blank verse translation of the *Inferno* by Charles Rogers (1782). Thomas William Parsons published a Francesca version in heroic couplets in the *Florence Miscellany* (1785), Henry Boyd rendered a six-line stanza of it in his complete *Inferno* (1802), and Henry Constantine Jennings translated the passage in blank verse in 1794. In the early nineteenth century, several translations contributed to the renown of the Francesca episode: Nathaniel Howard’s (1807), Henry Francis Cary’s (1805), Joseph Humes’s blank verse renderings of Canto V (1812), James Henry Leigh Hunt’s *The Story of Rimini* (1816), and Lord Byron’s separate version (1820).

<sup>15</sup> In a footnote to his translation Jennings wrote, “*This melancholy event, in which Dante was nearly interested, from the protection given him, to the last, by the father of the lady [the Polenta family] (who was the most beautiful woman of her time), seems to be recorded by him, with the sole view of illustrating by actual, and then recent example, the dangerous practice of young people’s reading romances together in private.*” (emphasis, mine, 12)

<sup>16</sup> In his *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987*, Lawrence Stone has suggested that “patriarchy” may be too strong a word to describe the parent-child relationship in England in the early eighteenth century, meaning that not many parents of that time compelled their children to marry a particular person or imposed a veto without good reasons. Nevertheless, I prefer to follow Harth, who argues that, at least in terms of marital choice, “patriarchy” is an appropriate term for describing this period (1990, 54).



gender reversal: Dante's Francesca becomes a man, a change which in this particular case emphasizes the possibility of redemption for Serena who is now in the same position as Dante the pilgrim listening to Francesca.

This reference to the Francesca episode illustrates however that Hayley's imitation of the *Commedia* often remains at a superficial level and may be quite imprecise. Indeed, while Dante's *Inferno* becomes in Canto III a sort of fairy land and sometimes a parody of the horrors of Hell, in Canto V Dante's *Paradise* is eventually turned into a kind of burlesque, where the character Serena is portrayed praising the patience of those victimized women she meets in that location for having endured mistreatment from their husbands and fathers (e.g., "Whose patience weather'd all paternal storms" V.554). On the other hand, linguistically, Hayley often mirrors the *Commedia* in rather close detail.<sup>18</sup> For example, earlier in Canto V the fair Sophrosyne addresses Serena in terms which echo the Latin poet's remarks to the Italian: Hayley's "But fix thine eye attentive to the plain, / And mark the varying wonders of her reign" (V.195-196) is reminiscent of the imperatives of Dante's Virgil: "Mira colui con quella spada in mano" (*Inf.* IV.86), and "Guarda' mi disse 'le feroci Erine'" (*Inf.* IX.45).

To sum up, in *The Triumphs of Temper* Hayley's appropriation of Dante's *Commedia* happens at the levels of plot and protagonist. With heroic Serena, Hayley introduces an innovation to the traditional masculine world of epic found in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*<sup>19</sup>, proposing a new type of heroic poem which regarded "women's education" as invaluable for the formation of a British nation. While the *Triumphs of Temper* introduced Dante's *Commedia* to the British audience in an indirect way, through literary influences coming from a largely unknown writer,<sup>20</sup> Hayley's *Essay on Epic Poetry*, which translates part of the *Commedia*, bestows more attention on Dante the author and his work. In the following section, I will focus on Hayley's original and foreignizing *Essay on Epic Poetry* that included a translation of *Inferno* I-III.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Hayley's language also recalls Pope's mock-heroic mode with its formal language and prosody, and the pseudo-Miltonic style, with its inversions and Latinisms (especially line 333).

<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Williams discusses Pope's conviction that Homer should be read as a guide to manliness: *Pope, Homer, and Manliness: Some Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Classical Learning* (1993).

<sup>20</sup> Tinkler-Villani has pointed out that Hayley's visionary appropriation of the *Commedia* in *The Triumphs of Temper* actually led British intellectuals like Anna Seward to be struck by the horrors of the real *Inferno* once she read it and by the egotism of its protagonist, Dante (1989, 93).

<sup>21</sup> After describing the translation process as a particular kind of rewriting, Lawrence Venuti identifies two interpretive categories helpful in studying prevailing patterns in the history of translation practice, namely "foreignizing" and "domesticating" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 1994, 43-98). "Foreignizing" designates a translation process which attempts to bring part of the source-text culture into the target culture by linguistic experimentalism or by the revival of marginalized literary forms of the target culture, which results in a contrast to the prevailing literary agenda. "Domestication," on the other hand, refers to

### Hayley's *Essay on Epic Poetry* and his Partial Translation of *Inferno*

In eighteenth-century Great Britain, the few epics which made it to the press were written by minor poets: Richard Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* (1695), *King Arthur* (1697), *Eliza* (1705) and *King Alfred* (1723); Richard Glover's *Leonidas* (1737), William Wilkie's *The Epigoniad* (1757), George Cockings' *War* (1781), James Ogden's *The Revolution* (1790) and John Ogilvie's *Britannia* (1801). Many contemporary epic poems rediscovered medieval England but generally met little success. More popular, instead, were epic translations, which were undertaken by well-known British writers and provided a more direct connection to the classical tradition, a major concern for the Neoclassical age. John Dryden's *Aeneid* (1693), Alexander Pope's *Iliad* (1715) and *Odyssey* (1726), and William Cowper's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (1791) are among the most prominent examples of the several English versions which appropriated and domesticated the grandiose Roman and Greek cultures. Translation became such a common means of transferring the aura of past civilizations that in 1761 Macpherson forged one, the Gaelic epic *Fingal*, in order to overcome the lack of surviving ancient epic in Great Britain (*Beowulf* being the only outstanding remnant).

As the British literary scene gradually changed, more and more attention was paid to the Middle Ages, as part of a cultural self-discovery in the rising British nation. Italian literature also received attention, as part of a progressive rejection of Neoclassicism, and as a reconnection to Italian culture which had influenced two important periods of English literature, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. By the eighteenth century, even Dante's *Commedia* began to be considered an epic worthy of translation. After employing the *Divine Comedy* as a model for his new heroic poetry in *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), William Hayley rehabilitated the medieval poem in his *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782) and translated part of it as an example of a remarkable epic.

Hayley's *Essay on Epic Poetry* is actually a verse commentary on the epic genre intended to encourage British writers to produce epic poems: "I wish to kindle in our Poets a warmer sense of national honor, with ambition to excel in the noblest province of poesy" (DEL 1909, 1: 363). In this essay, Hayley not only uses the *Commedia* as an epic model worthy of imitation, but he also revalues Dante himself as a writer to be

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a process aimed at making the source-text intelligible and even familiar to the target-language reader by avoiding the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the source-text and thus conforming to the dominant literary canon of the target culture. Of course, in the last analysis, all translation is domestication because translation methods can never be free of "domestic" values. "In foreignizing translation, the difference of the foreign text can only ever be figured by domestic values that differ from those in dominance" (*ibid.*, 98). Despite this limitation, I employ Venuti's interpretive categories "domesticating" and "foreignizing" to discuss translation practice in the eighteenth century and to distinguish the various cultural functions of the *Commedia* renderings.

emulated. He exhorts British writers to become new Dantes who, like the medieval poet, will expand the matter and form of epic. In Hayley's opinion, the new epic should include satire, religion, and romantic love. As pointed out earlier in this article, participating in the "feminization of discourse" of his century and possibly influenced by the courtly tradition of medieval romance, Hayley thinks that women, not only men, should be epic's major protagonists; that its form should be various and include different stanza patterns, meters, and rhymes; and finally, that its main purpose should be didactic: "That verse shou'd ever rise on Virtue's base, / And every master of this matchless art / Exalt the Spirit, and improve the Heart" (78). To support his radical proposals, Hayley translated parts of Dante's *Inferno* and Ercilla's *La Araucana*, though he oddly placed them in the lengthy notes to Epistle III.

Hayley's rendering of the first three canti of *Inferno* was the first published English translation of more than one episode of the *Commedia*. It not only broke new ground, but also contributed significantly to Dante's reception in Great Britain as a daring writer and as a poet of Hell. Hayley's version of Dante was recognized and discussed by contemporary scholars, including John Duncombe, John Hoole, Anna Seward, Samuel Henley, Robert Southey and Leigh Hunt.<sup>22</sup> Henley regretted that Hayley had not translated the whole *Inferno* (DEL 1909, 1: 439), and Southey affirmed that a "greater effect was produced upon the rising generation of scholars by the Notes to his *Essay on Epic Poetry*, than by any other contemporary work, the Relics of Ancient Poetry alone excepted" (*ibid.*, 283).

Hayley's rendering of *Inferno* I-III was preceded by an assessment of Dante's life. Lives of Dante were being written with more frequency towards the end of the eighteenth century. This trend counteracted the previous English ploy of "stealing" from Dante without acknowledging his name.<sup>23</sup> Like other accounts of Dante's life, Hayley's described the medieval poet as an historical figure who was "unjustly persecuted by those of his own faction" and forced to wander Italy as an exile (23-24). Unlike other contemporary discussions of the *Commedia*, however, Hayley's attempted to provide a full and balanced literary perspective on the medieval poem and reproduced previous literary criticism of Dante's work written by Boccaccio, Voltaire and the Wartons.

Because of Hayley's interest in the epic design of the *Commedia*, the British poet avoided translating episodes from it, unlike most of his predecessors, and he also rejected

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<sup>22</sup> Although Duncombe thought Hayley's *Commedia* would never become popular because "the measure of the original is not adapted to our language," he was generally favorable and called it "faithful to the sense and spirit of the original" (DEL 1909, 1: 379). Hoole emphasized the "wonderful spirit and fidelity" of Hayley's translation (*ibid.*, 388). Seward called it a "sublime English version" (*ibid.*, 396).

<sup>23</sup> In *Volpone*, Ben Jonson had mentioned that Dante was among the several Italian writers from whom the British "deign to steal" (DEL 1909, 1: 109).

the elitist Neoclassical translation practice of *les belles infidèles*, which translated what was considered the best from a writer's work (primarily the Ugolino and Francesca episodes).<sup>24</sup> Instead, he showed his concern for the grand epic design of the entire *Divine Comedy* by adhering to its structure and by translating from its beginning.

The length of Hayley's version and the original text on the opposite page suggest that he was perhaps intending to undertake a complete translation. In the introduction to his version, Hayley actually hints at such a project:

We have several versions of the celebrated story of Ugolino; but I believe no entire Canto of Dante has hitherto appeared in our language, though his whole work has been translated into French, Spanish, and Latin verse. The three Cantos which follow, were translated a few years ago, to oblige a particular friend. The Author has since been solicited to execute an entire translation of Dante; but *the extreme inequality of this Poet* would render such a work a very laborious undertaking, and it appears very doubtful how far such a version would interest our country. Perhaps the reception of these Cantos may discover to the Translator the sentiments of the public. (emphasis mine, 31-32)

Hayley is rather cautious with such a controversial subject as Dante and grounds his desire to translate the *Commedia* on external factors. The writer rendered *Inferno* I-III to please "a particular friend," and then published his translation to rescue Great Britain from its provinciality, as neighboring France and Spain already possessed versions of the entire *Commedia*. Although others reportedly asked Hayley to render Dante's poem, the translator hesitates because of the great difficulties posed by its irregular, inconsistent style. The poet then describes his translation as a sample which he would have continued if met with positive reactions from the reading public. (Since Hayley's attempt received insufficient encouragement, the writer abandoned the partially-formed project of translating the whole poem, and we have only its first three cantos.) Just as in *The Triumphs of Temper*, Hayley here shows himself to be both a Neoclassical and a Pre-romantic writer.<sup>25</sup> On one side, Hayley is a Neoclassical scholar who has reservations about the *Commedia* because he sees in it an inconsistent style. On the other side, the translator appears to be an innovative Pre-romantic interested in changing the status of Dante's *Commedia* provided that the reading public concurs, which implies that aesthetic judgement and authority rely principally on the audience.

Although Hayley conditions his rendering on exterior factors, his rather literal translation and his rejection of the *belles infidèles* Neoclassical translating practice tell us that he was at least beginning to consider Dante and his work as authoritative. In the

<sup>24</sup> For a description of eighteenth-century translating techniques, see "The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (Baker 2021, 339-341).

<sup>25</sup> Tinkler-Villani discusses Hayley's Neoclassicism and Pre-romanticism in relation to *The Triumphs of Temper* (1989, 78).

following paragraphs, I draw attention to important aspects of Hayley's translation and connect them with the British eighteenth-century rediscovery of Dante. Hayley's translation is a quite literal rendition of the *Commedia* as revealed by the comparable number of lines, by the similar rhyming pattern, and by few semantic deviations. In the following analysis, I focus not so much on the precision of Hayley's translation as on some of its distortions because they provide valuable insight into the translator's appropriation of Dante's poetry. Here are Hayley's opening lines:

In the mid season of this *mortal strife*, 1  
 I found myself within a gloomy grove,  
*Far wandering from the ways of perfect life;*  
 The place I know not, where I chanc'd to rove,  
 It was a wood so wild, it wounds me sore  
 But to remember with what ills I strove:  
 Such still my dread, that death is little more.  
 But I will tell the good which there I found.  
 High things 't was there my fortune to explore:  
 Yet how I enter'd on that secret ground 10  
 I know not to explain; so much in sleep  
 My mortal senses at that hour were drown'd.  
 But when I reached the bottom of a steep,  
 That rose to terminate the *dreary vale*,  
 Which made *cold terrors* thro' my bosom creep,  
 (emphasis mine, *Essay on Epic Poetry* 1782, 33-35)

In the first line, Hayley translates Dante's "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" with "In the mid season of this mortal strife." Whereas Dante began with the imagery of life as a journey ("cammin di . . . vita"), Hayley emphasizes the temporary and toilsome nature of human life ("season of . . . mortal strife"). Hayley's revision "mortal strife" yields a more negative sense than Dante's, adding a graveyard reminder to the reader that death is inevitable. Later, Hayley's translation acquires a Gothic coloring which will become more pronounced and consistent in Canto III, where Dante describes the damned souls and hell itself.

We can learn much by studying Hayley's adjectival expansions, a typical Neoclassical device drawing on the poetry of Spenser and sometimes related to metrical padding. Here in Canto I, among Hayley's many adjectival expansions are some expressing terror, horror and dread. For instance, in the opening lines, Hayley's phrases "dreary vale" and "cold terrors" translate respectively the bare nouns "valle" and "paura" (*Inf.* I.14-15). Some verses later, Dante's "con la test'alta e con rabbiosa fame" (*Inf.* I.46-47) becomes "with open jaws, a thirst for human gore." The addition "human gore" and the variation "open jaws" make of the *Commedia* a sensational work producing a frisson similar to that of contemporary Gothic.

Tinkler-Villani has suggested that in Hayley's version Dante becomes something like the main character of a Gothic novel, since certain features of the translation seem to emphasize "the protagonist's sensibility," that is, the hero's emotional state (1989, 96). Following the path of *The Triumphs of Temper*, in his translation of *Inferno* I-III Hayley endows Dante the protagonist with feminine traits.<sup>26</sup> For instance, Hayley describes Dante as "blushing," a behavior characteristically attributed to females in eighteenth-century literature: "I answer'd, blushing at his kind account" translates Dante's "rispuos'io lui con vergognosa fronte" (*Inf.* I.81). Most importantly, Hayley's Dante is a character who, like the protagonists of eighteenth-century novels, undergoes a journey of education but not of purification. Hayley depicts Dante as a character without moral blemish. For instance, Dante's "ne lagrimar," which shows his initial tearful pity for the infernal sinners, is rendered by Hayley with "my fears arose," a more self-centered reaction, but one which does not potentially question divine justice (*Inf.* III.24).

Hayley's domestication of Dante's *Inferno* seems to involve not only moral, but also religious dimensions. The British poet appears to bestow a Protestant censure upon Dante's *Inferno* I-III by lessening the role played by Mary, the Mother of God.

A gentle spirit (Lucia is her name)  
 In heaven laments the hardships of my friend,  
 For whom I ask your aid: to me she came,  
 And kindly bade me to his woes attend:  
 Behold (she said) thy servant in distress!  
 And I his safety to thy care commend.  
 (*Hell.* II.94-99)

Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compianghe  
 di questo 'mpedimento, ov'io ti mando,  
 sì che duro giudicio là su frange.  
 Questa chiese Lucia in suo dimando,  
 e disse: "Or ha bisogno il tuo fedele  
 di te, ed io a te lo raccomando."  
 (*Inf.* II.94-99)

In Dante's poem, Beatrice explains to Virgil that she has been sent on this errand by Lucia, who, in her turn, has been summoned by a third "Donna . . . gentil," recognized by critics as Maria. In Hayley's version, however, Lucia and Beatrice are the only women

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<sup>26</sup> The attribution of feminine traits to a male protagonist is a phenomenon which can also be noted in contemporary British literature. In Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey, through France and Italy* (1768), the protagonist and narrator of the journey, Parson Yorick, is a man of sensibility who is frequently moved to tears.



Behind it, driven by Fate's supreme command,  
 Came such a host! I ne'er could have believ'd  
 Death had collected so complete a band.  
 When now I had the forms of all perceiv'd,  
 I saw the shade of that *ignoble priest*,  
 Of sovereign power by indolence bereav'd.                    60  
 (emphasis mine, *Inf.* III.43-60)

The *terza rima* is a three-lined stanza with a continuous rhyming pattern ABA, BCB, CDC etc. Although Hayley managed to reproduce Dante's *terza rima*, he chose not to imitate the Italian poet's hendecasyllabic line, opting instead for the iambic pentameter, a more native English rhythm. The pattern of hendecasyllables is more difficult to reproduce in English than in Italian, as Romance languages more naturally employ syllabic meters, while Germanic languages incline toward accentual rhythms. Another difficulty which faced Hayley was the fact that Italian is richer in rhymes than English. For this reason, Hayley's translation became not merely a replication of Dante's poem but an invention in the sense discussed by Barbara Folkart ("Modes of Writing: Translation as Replication or Invention" 1993, 5: xv-xxii). In order to render the *Inferno* in *terza rima*, the translator had to forge a new form of English meter. Hayley succeeded in employing the *terza rima* and maintained some of Dante's rhythm through the use of the English iambic pentameter and three additional literary devices: Latinisms, alliteration, and padding. Hayley's Latinisms sometimes enabled him to rhyme the verses (e.g., "grate" and "fate" in the preceding passage). His use of alliteration (e.g., "s" in line 59 assisted in reproducing the sound of Dante's text (alliterations are typical of Dante but also of the traditional British epic, see *Beowulf*). Finally, Hayley's padding helped to maintain his iambic pentameter. Of course, Hayley's expansions added various connotations to Dante's text, as demonstrated by the Gothic coloring of the adjectives which I have underlined in the passage above: "grievous," "scornful," "troubled" and "ignoble."

We can regard Hayley's decision to translate *Inferno* I-III in *terza rima* as innovative and foreignizing, a radical departure from translating epic in heroic couplets, the habit of the first half of the eighteenth century (Pope's Homer), or from rendering it in blank verse, the practice of the second half of the eighteenth century (Cowper's Homer). Hayley's literal translation practice is consistent with his theoretical stance in the *Essay on Epic Poetry*, where he encourages British poets to imitate Dante as an epic poet. By attempting a rhyme relatively new to English in translating *Inferno* I-III in *terza rima*, Hayley showed not only a deep concern for the source text, but also a radical intention to introduce innovation into English poetry. Although Geoffrey Chaucer, Samuel Daniel, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard Surrey had already tried the *terza rima*, and Milton had used it in one of his Psalm translations, this verse form was

employed only infrequently by British poets. Hayley's translation enhanced its status in English. Thereafter, Lord Byron translated part of *Inferno V* in *terza rima* (1820), and also composed *The Prophecy of Dante* (1821) in the same pattern.<sup>27</sup> Also, in this period Shelley used *terza rima* in *The Triumph of Life* (1822).

Finally, Hayley's undertaking was noteworthy because, even without being fully aware of it, the translator contributed to a more correct interpretation of Dante's text. As Freccero has pointed out, the *terza rima* has a significance in the *Divine Comedy* beyond a simple representation of the trinity (1986 258-71). The forward movement of the *terza rima* mirrors a similar movement which Freccero sees at every level, semantic and formal, of the *Commedia*, including its *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. After the quite loose literary appropriation of *The Triumphs of Temper*, Hayley's translation of the *Divine Comedy* shows that the study of Dante's poem was advancing, and that increasing attention was being given to poetics rather than facts and narration. In the last analysis, Hayley's work was an important basis for recognition of Dante as author by British Romantics, and illustrates that acknowledgement of a foreign writer occurs in a target culture by means of both foreignizing and domesticating forces satisfying a need for literary change while partially supporting the *status quo*.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Prophecy of Dante* was written in 1819 but not published until 1821.

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