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Exploiting Dante: Dante and his women popularizers, 1850-1910

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Exploiting Dante; Dante and his women popularisers, 1850-1910 1

Anne Laurence, The Open University

Many of the chapters in this volume are concerned with how Dante was consumed by nineteenth-century readers or interpreted by writers. In contrast, this one is concerned with how he was exploited by women writers. It concentrates not on women such as George Eliot, Mary Shelley and Elizabeth Barrett Browning with significant literary reputations, but rather on Dante's translators and the authors of the great burgeoning of popular works on Dante which appeared mainly after 1850.² It is as much about Dante dissemination as Dante reception.

The reason for identifying Dante's female popularisers is that they made such a noteworthy contribution as authors of dozens of translations, versions and retellings of Dante. Their work appeared in prose, verse and drama, from serious studies of aspects of his work and new translations, to a Dante calendar. Just about the only popular manifestation in which he did not appear was that nineteenth-century favourite: the birthday book. There were gendered reasons for women's conspicuousness: the difficulty that women had in having their scholarship recognised and also their prominence in journalism and in writing for children and for schools, especially following the 1870 Education Act. These works rarely reassess Dante's place in European literature or analyse the structure, symbolism or language of his writing,

The chapter is concerned with some of the chief types of work in which women published on Dante: translations, popular retellings for adults and for children. It is also concerned with some of the ways in which he became a cultural commodity, being put to work in many of the same ways as Shakespeare to feed the social and cultural aspirations of the growing middle-class of Victorian England interested in self-improvement. The historical character of Dante and the text of the *Commedia* and the *Vita Nuova* provided not only useful quarries for plots but also eminently saleable subject matter adaptable to different genres. Dante was an emblem for Italian civilisation and the learning of authors, but also an author's courtesy to readers, recognising their good taste and cultivation, with the added advantage that it was easy to associate him with Christian values.

Did Dante have a particular appeal to women? Certainly there are many women writers who felt that he touched them in some particular way, spiritual or poetic, or that the story of Dante and Beatrice spoke to them. Some used the study of Dante as a way of entering the world of scholarship from which they were professionally

excluded.³ Some used Dante as an expression for a particular love of Italy, a love that could have a political edge in the cause of Italian liberation. Dante's appeal reached many religious denominations from rationalist Unitarians (many of whom were supporters of the Risorgimento) to high church Anglicans and mystical Theosophists.⁴

Translators

Although by the nineteenth century the *Commedia* had been translated into English many times, there remained some works, notably the *Convivio*, which remained untranslated. The first two English versions were by women: Elizabeth Price Sayer (1887) and Katharine Hillard (1889), followed in 1903 by Philip Wicksteed's version. Women also produced new translations of the *Commedia*, the *Vita Nuova* and Dante's other works, as well as translations of foreign scholarship connected with his life and times.⁵

Virtually nothing is known of Elizabeth Price Sayer (fl.1887-97), whose edition of the *Convivio* appeared in 1887, in the series Morley's Universal Library.⁶ The series editor, Henry Morley, journalist, populariser of literary classics and professor of English at University College London, normally published editions by well-known translators: the *Commedia* appeared in Longfellow's translation and *Decameron* in Florio's. Morley ventured into new territory by publishing a translation by a contemporary, in this case the first translation into English of *Convivio*. It seems likely that the translator was a relative of his Unitarian wife, Mary Anne Sayer Morley. Sayer made a further appearance in print in 1897 when she wrote a letter to a periodical arguing that sparrows were not pests but were God's creatures, that man should not attempt to interfere in the harmony of nature, and quoting 'the immortal Dante' in *Convivio* in support of her view.⁷

Sayer's translation did not win reviewers' approval. Paget Toynbee acquired the extensively annotated copy used by Frederick York Powell for his anonymous review in the *Athenaeum*. Powell was critical of Sayer for her ignorance of Dante's classical sources and took Morley to task for not entrusting the translation to a more competent person. Powell, like other reviewers, noted that *Convivio* would never be attractive to the general reader and that most would be confirmed in their view that the work was no more than 'an unintelligible jumble of words'.⁸ The reviewer in the *Saturday Review* was less harsh, but observed that without notes the work was hard to understand.⁹

Katharine Hillard (1839/40-1915) grew up in an American Unitarian family in England, became involved with the Theosophical movement, and returned to America. Like Sayer, she published nothing else on Dante, though she did produce a two-volume abridgement of Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*. Her translation of *Convivio* shows her considerable acquaintance with contemporary Dantian scholarship and her willingness to engage with such contentious matters as whether the work should be called *Convito* or *Convivio*; the allegorical or historical existence of Beatrice; and the internal evidence for dating the work.¹⁰ She argued that the best way to understand Dante was by close acquaintance with the language, which she had herself acquired through living in Italy.¹¹

Edward Moore acknowledged Hillard's translation as 'accurate, scholarly and graceful in style', though he was critical of her interpretation of the astronomy and of what he regarded as her overdependence on Giuliani's commentary, which Moore believed to be 'reckless and offhand'.¹² The reviewer in the *Athenaeum* welcomed Hillard's translation as evidence of the popularisation of Dante's work rather than as a significant contribution to its scholarship, calling it 'most creditable'. However, he could not resist commenting that Hillard

had started with an exaggerated idea of the advantages to be obtained by "several years' residence in Italy and intercourse with intelligent Italians". Italian intelligence is not doubt great, but it is long since it has been exercised in the direction of accurate scholarship.¹³

The afterlife of these translations may be seen in the subsequent translations by Philip Wicksteed (1903) and W.W. Jackson (1909). Wicksteed's came out in J.M. Dent's popular Temple Classics. Having not consulted Hillard's translation until he had completed his own, he commented that it had earned 'my high admiration of the sustained brilliance of her work from the literary point of view'.¹⁴ Wicksteed's edition was reprinted twice, making it the most popular by far. Jackson, whose edition was published by the Clarendon Press, also expressed his admiration for 'The taste and spirit of Miss Hillard's translation'.¹⁵ Neither Wicksteed nor Jackson mentioned Sayer's work.

Both Sayer and Hillard seem to have been motivated by a sense of personal connection with Dante's life and work. Morley's introduction to Sayer's *Convivio* claimed that the translator's 'enthusiasm for the genius of Dante has made it a chief pleasure of her life to dwell on it' and that she had also translated all of Dante's other works.¹⁶ Hillard regarded herself as a serious student of Dante and offered her translation as a contribution to understanding 'the great scheme of Dante'.¹⁷

Apart from these two new translations, women contributed a number of further complete and partial translations of the *Commedia* and of *Vita Nuova*.¹⁸ Claudia Hamilton Ramsay's rendition into English of the entire *Commedia* in terza rima (1862-3) was the first complete translation by a woman. She had lived for some time in Italy, was taken with the magic of the country where Dante had lived, and assured her readers that 'the Italian tongue has been as familiar to me as my own'.¹⁹ There are notes but no reference to other Dante authorities. The translation received glowing reviews tinged with condescension. 'It is scarcely possible to imagine a translation nearer in accordance with the original'; 'a tasteful perhaps a fine work'; welcoming 'these modest and unpretending volumes with satisfaction', though the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* reviewer believed it to be 'too ladylike'.²⁰

Caroline Potter's translation of some cantos from the *Commedia* turned from what seems to have been a vanity project into a commercial one. Her first version, published in 1894, appeared with an elaborate binding and decorated page borders. This must have been produced specially as her Halifax publisher's output normally consisted of such everyday items as a catalogue of additions to the Halifax library and the proceedings of the local 'geological and polytechnic society'. An expanded edition was published in London in 1897 and an edition further expanded to 39 cantos, in 1899. She aspired to provide as near a literal translation as possible for those who could not read Italian.²¹ Her London publishers produced mainly fiction, some of it translated from other European languages. The reviewer in the *Athenaeum* dismissed this translation as 'the worst rendering of Dante which has up to now appeared', the *Academy* as 'diffuse' and 'very unfortunate'.²²

Passages from the *Vita Nuova* had been translated by Anne Jameson in 1829, and in 1902 Frances de Meÿ published a complete translation.²³ De Meÿ's was printed 'for my immediate circle' by the Chiswick Press who published some of William Morris's work.²⁴ She had lived in Italy for a time and died in 1914, bequeathing all her books relating to Dante to the London Dante Society and the manuscript of her translation and its rights to her nephew.²⁵

Apart from translation, women were considered to be well adapted to the kind of painstaking work of compiling concordances. Frances Locock published a brief biographical guide to the characters appearing in the *Commedia*.²⁶ The reviewers treated the guide enthusiastically as an aid to reading Dante, evidence that by 1871 there was a wide readership for Dante, but one that needed help.²⁷ Her publishing career spanned a mere two years; the only other works she published were translations from French and German.

These translations and guides to Dante were written by women who had a real enthusiasm for the poet and his works. Their restricted publishing careers suggest the fulfilment of an enthusiasm rather than either literary or academic aspirations. It was men such as Henry Barlow, Philip Wicksteed and Paget Toynbee who made a life's work of Dante studies.

Reversioning Dante for adults

Retelling episodes from the life of Dante or studies from his writing (the distinction was often unclear) was a popular genre, combining Italian history, European culture and moral uplift. The growing popularity of Dante can be seen in his frequent appearance in the periodical literature. Between 1863 and 1865 Charlotte Yonge's *Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church* published a sixteen-part study of Dante and his work.²⁸ This was followed during the period 1869-73 by a series of translations from the *Commedia* with summary and commentary, in 1891 by an article by Rose E. Selfe on Dante and Beatrice, and in 1894 by a six-part account of Dante's times and his work by A.J. Butler, with a competition (entrance fee 2s 6d) which was a test on his articles. Runner-up in the competition was the writer Emily Underdown.²⁹ Meanwhile, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published a number of long articles on Dante, many of them anonymous.³⁰ From around 1855 Margaret Oliphant was a frequent contributor to the journal and it is likely that some of the contributions on Dante after that date were written by her.³¹

Apart from the periodical literature, there was a spate of books concerned with how to read Dante. Typical examples are Arabella Shore's *Dante for Beginners* (1886); M. Alice Wyld's *The Dread Inferno: Notes for Beginners* (1904); Marie Louise Egerton Castle's *Dante* (1907) in Bell's Miniature Series of Great Writers, a series largely devoted to British writers, and Marion Bainbrigge's, *A Walk in Other Worlds with Dante* (1914). For all these writers the paramount aim was educational. Shore advised that 'for young and inexperienced readers the simple enjoyment of the glorious poetry should precede the philosophical, no less than the philological and archaeological investigation of it'.³² Wyld's book was the product of her experience of having taught classes in Dante. As well as being concerned with the language, she wanted to make sure that readers understood Dante's 'grand conception...of the Harmony of the Universe'.³³ For Castle an appreciation of medieval Florence was the key to understanding Dante.³⁴ Both Shore and Castle offered interpretations or translations of the episode of Paolo and Francesca.³⁵ Despite Bainbrigge's title, her work was a compilation of 'the beautiful and elevating thoughts' gathered together in compact form 'for those who say "*Dante is too deep*"', to assist those 'who have just a few

moments to spare in this hurrying age' or who were without the 'leisure or inclination' to study the work or to learn Italian.³⁶

The Victorian spirit of religious doubt, one might even say fear, meant that Dante was recruited as an aid to faith.³⁷ Rose E. Selfe's *How Dante Climbed the Mountain* of 1887, is subtitled 'Sunday Readings with the Children from the *Purgatorio*'. The introduction was written by William Boyd Carpenter, Bishop of Ripon, a Dante enthusiast. Selfe's reference to her use of Plumtre's translation suggests that children were not her only intended readership. Each chapter opens with a quotation, followed by a summary of the story and the moral lessons to draw from it. The work was popular enough to be reprinted three further times. In 1891 she contributed an essay on Dante and Beatrice to Charlotte Yonge's *Monthly Packet*. In 1900 *With Dante in Paradise*, in the same format as *How Dante Climbed the Mountain*, was published 'to open the door of Dante's Paradise to some who are not already his disciples, that they may enter in and learn for themselves what is God's message through him to the souls of men'.³⁸ Selfe wrote further works of spiritual counsel, one with a foreword by Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, but she was enough of an Italian scholar to produce a translation of Villani's *Chronicles* edited by Wicksteed.

The numerous other spiritual works rarely showed as much scholarship as Selfe's, though Paget Toynbee wrote the introduction to Rosemary Cotes's *Dante's Garden with Legends of the Flowers* (1898). Gardens and flowers were favourite subjects for Victorian works of popular spirituality. Working through a variety of plants that appear in Dante's works, a moral lesson was drawn about each. 'When [Dante] passed before his myrtle tree, his thoughts may have recurred (sic) to the legend of St Dominic'.³⁹ This and a second book, *Bible Flowers* (1904), were her only publications.

Two particular features characterise the use of Dante in many spiritual works. The first was his recruitment to the forces of Protestantism: Dante's falling out with the papacy and his position as a figure of neither the Middle Ages nor the Renaissance (or, alternatively, featuring in both) made it easy to treat him as a Protestant *avant la lettre*. The second was the use of the image of the pilgrim and pilgrimage, particularly resonant for a reading public familiar with John Bunyan. Marian Andrews (née Hare), writing as Christopher Hare, exploited both themes.⁴⁰ In *Dante the Wayfarer* (1905) she took 'Dante as my guide for an earthly pilgrimage; following him through the ancient cities of Northern Italy'.⁴¹ Although rather breathlessly concerned with stepping in the poet's footsteps, there are nevertheless references to the work of such Dante scholars as Toynbee, Cary, Gardner and Wicksteed. The reviewer in the *Academy* had exposed the author's disguise: "'Christopher Hare" is not a formidable

enemy to Date's reputation, though in this book "he" has many times miswritten, mismetred, and misinterpreted his author'.⁴² Andrews wrote extensively on a variety of historical subjects—on medieval France and the Holy Roman Empire as well as Italy—and published historical novels. Many of her works stress the use of original documents or emphasise the attempt to portray her subjects with historical accuracy. *Men and Women of the Italian Reformation* (1914) was described by one reviewer as 'a kind of "Who's Who" of the Italian Reformation'.⁴³ The book does not question in what a Reformation in Italy might have consisted, but appropriates to it Dante and such other precursors of reform as St Augustine, Francis of Assisi, St Catherine of Siena and Savonarola: 'Was there ever more passionate zeal for reform than inspired the pilgrim of "Divina Commedia"?'⁴⁴ Andrews preserved the conceit of her pseudonym by using Christopher Hare's signature to decorate the cover of the book. A comparable work, by Alice Birkhead B.A. (the degree is mentioned on the title page) was *Heroes of Modern Europe* (1913) with chapters on men who either were Protestant (Luther, the Sea Beggars, William the Silent, Henri IV of France) or who could be considered to have added to the progressive enlightenment of Europe (Dante, Savonarola, Voltaire, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Peter the Great and Tolstoy). The tone is relentlessly Whig; 'Back into the Middle Ages Dante and Savonarola draw us, marvelling at the narrow limits which bound the vision of such free unfettered minds'.⁴⁵

The pilgrimage appears in two forms: as a spiritual journey and as a tribute to the master in the form of a tour of the places that were important in his life. While Andrews combined both elements in *Dante the Wayfarer*, Emilia Russell Gurney's *Dante's Pilgrim's Progress* (1893) is very much of the first type. It is subtitled 'The passage of the blessed soul from the slavery of the present corruption to the liberty of eternal glory' and dedicated to the same Bishop of Ripon—Boyd Carpenter—who wrote one of Selfe's introductions. It was judged likely to appeal to 'reflective and sensitive readers'.⁴⁶ Gurney's work consists of an anthology of fragments (in Italian) relating the passage of the soul from the present to eternal glory. Readers were recommended to read aloud the passages, using Longfellow if a translation were needed. Unlike most other collections, she deliberately excluded passages of dramatic incident and treated hell, purgatory and paradise as conditions of the human heart. In addition, there were notes on the spiritual significance of the passages 'as subjects for meditation with Dante on the Eternal verities he unfolds and on our abiding portion in God', accompanied by many quotations from the Bible and from writers such as George Herbert, Tennyson, Jacob Boehme, Bunyan, and St Bernard.⁴⁷ Gurney is best remembered as a campaigner for women's higher education and as one of the founders of Girton College, Cambridge. Brought up as an evangelical Calvinist, her

interest in spirituality and the mystical aspects of Christianity grew following her husband's death.⁴⁸ Her book was itself considered by Lucy Hodgkin, author of works on Quaker spirituality, to be in need of a guide. Hodgkin claimed that her study of mystic imagery in the *Paradise* was 'simpler' than Gurney's, the interest of Dante being 'world-deep, if not world-wide'.⁴⁹

The most literal manifestation of the Dante pilgrimage is to be found in Mary Hensman's *Dante Map* of 1892, identifying places named in his writings and supposedly visited by him in his exile. Hensman says that she found it useful in her 'study of Dante, and when following his traces in Italy'.⁵⁰ Among the acknowledgements is one to Philip Wicksteed.

Dante's spiritual values and politics contributed to the nineteenth-century search for the cultural origins of national identity, and especially to the cause of Italian liberation whose anti-papal elements converged with English anti-Catholicism.⁵¹ In 1844 Mazzini wrote that Dante had devoted his energies to a 'national aim—the same desire that vibrates instinctively on the bosoms of twenty-two millions of men'.⁵² Mazzini was a popular figure in London and was adopted by the family of William Ashurst, a Unitarian well-known for his support of radical causes, who invited him to live with them in 1846.⁵³ One of the four daughters, Emilie (later Hawkes, later Venturi), wrote the essay on Dante in the *Dictionary of Universal Biography*, but she is better remembered for her work for Mazzini, notably as his secretary in the 1840s, and as editor and translator of his writings, and as a founding member in 1851 of the Friends of Italy.⁵⁴ The Society had almost 800 members in its first year, of whom seventy-five were women and the cause gave rise to a considerable volume of fiction and poetry in English, much of it by women.⁵⁵

Elizabeth Kerr Coulson Colville, who wrote a two-volume novel *Dante and Beatrice* (1876) under the pseudonym Roxburghe Lothian. Inspired by Italian nationalism in her youth, Colville wrote of rapacious popes and corrupt cardinals.⁵⁶ She noted that though no library is considered complete without a copy of the *Divine Comedy*, yet 'few know the beauty and sweetness of his Love Poems'.⁵⁷ Characters in the extensively footnoted novel exclaim 'Bless me' and 'Tush', and the second volume concludes with twenty-five pages of appendices. These drew upon her knowledge of the language (she translated one of the love poems), of Florence and of a range of subjects such as the discovery of Dante's remains, the Portinari altarpiece, Franciscans, Masonic signs on Phoenician buildings in Palestine, the influences of Hebrew and Arabic learning on thirteenth century Florence, and Dante's possible residence in Wales. One reviewer assessed this as 'drearly instructive', with characters speaking like 'Shakespeare's clowns'.⁵⁸

Dante for children

Children's writing was not the sole preserve of women, but it was a genre in which they could readily find publishers. Nigel Cross suggests that 50 per cent of women writers specialised in writing for children (as compared with 10 per cent of men), while 30 per cent of women writers were novelists and 14 per cent poets.⁵⁹ Some of the writers who produced versions of Dante for children were clearly Dante enthusiasts. But for others, Dante was just one of a number of significant cultural figures used as subject matter for series of heroes of European culture or writers for all time in books or journals for older children.

One of those who was clearly an enthusiast was Emily Underdown (pseudonym Norley Chester), a prolific writer for both adults and children, many of her children's books being works of great authors abridged and adapted for children. Chaucer, Cervantes, Spenser and William Morris all received this treatment. Her single greatest interest, though, was Dante and his times.⁶⁰ Identifying episodes from Dante's life and work for a juvenile audience, Underdown wanted to bring out 'the spiritual truths underlying Dante's great poem' to awaken children's interest. She treated the *Commedia* as an autobiographical work and was unafraid to speculate about the more obscure parts of Dante's life: 'he was probably an eager little student who made rapid progress'.⁶¹ She mentioned his sorrow and disappointment; 'No wonder that in the portraits showing him in his later life, his face wears a terribly sad expression, as if it had lost the art of smiling'.⁶² She was no historian: 'we must remember that Dante lived in an age less enlightened than our own'.⁶³ Paget Toynbee's own copy is annotated with exclamation marks at Underdown's inaccuracies or suppositions (as, for example, her statements about the Donati family).⁶⁴ Praised by the *Pall Mall Gazette* for its choice of stories, the reviewer goes on to say 'Less happy, because impossible, is the author's attempt to explain the delicate sentimental relations of Dante and Beatrice. Vulgarity, however, has been successfully avoided, and that is something.'⁶⁵

In 1895 she published *Dante Vignettes*, a series of poems, with titles such as 'Beatrice's Love', 'Francesca's Kiss' and 'Ugolino's Humanity', each prefaced by a couple of lines in Italian. The opening lines of the sonnet to Dante suggest that this was not a work for children:

Majestic poet from whose throbbing soul

The deep pulsations still vibrate through time⁶⁶

Underdown's play, based on the *Vita Nuova*, contained what were evidently her translations of songs.

Mary MacGregor's *Stories from Dante* was number 39 in a series 'Told to the Children' to which she contributed at least eight volumes between around 1905 and 1915 (many are undated), illustrated by such well-known names as Walter Crane and Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale. Titles included versions of Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tales, Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes*; *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the legends of Arthur and Siegfried. She also wrote for other series lives of historical figures such as Captain Scott; introductions to the civilisations of Greece and Rome and even a version of Ruskin. *Stories from Dante* was reprinted three times and translated into Spanish. It opens with the words 'You may expect to find much that is sad, much that is terrible. Yet you may be certain that before the end of the tale you will find in it gladness and joy'.⁶⁷ Author and illustrator (R.T.Rose) combined to provide a painfully literal account of the three steps at the entrance to Purgatory, while the passage through the seven circles takes up a whole chapter.⁶⁸ Only her version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was reprinted as many times.

Dante as cultural commodity

The volume of work produced by both Underdown and MacGregor suggests that they made their livings by their pens, but, as with so many of these women, there is tantalisingly little information about their lives. In contrast is Margaret Oliphant who documented her own life extensively and who exploited Dante along with many other cultural figures. A prolific and successful author, over a career of over forty-five years, she wrote literary histories, biographies, translations, at least ninety-seven novels and, for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, over four hundred critical reviews.⁶⁹ Her first work on Dante was a piece in the *Cornhill Magazine* on his exile, though most of her journalism appeared in *Blackwood's*.⁷⁰ In the 1870s she became series editor of Blackwood's Foreign Classics for English Readers to which she herself contributed the first volume: an introduction to Dante's writings (a chapter on each of the principal works) with extensive quotation.⁷¹ The verse translations from the *Commedia* she did herself.⁷² Reviewers concentrated as much upon the series as upon Oliphant's own volume, not least because it opens with a prospectus for the series. Mandell Creighton's highly critical review stated that the volume showed 'neither the carefulness nor grasp of the subject to make it useful', choosing the "'plums"' out of Dante' and that her verse translations sacrificed everything to achieving a rhyme. He drew unfavourable comparisons between this and Maria Rossetti's *Shadow of Dante* and J.A. Symonds *Introduction to the Study of Dante*, both published not long before.⁷³ The *Athenaeum's* reviewer was no more charitable, writing of Oliphant's 'want of care' and commenting that 'the elucidation and exposition of Dante is not a task to be taken up in the intervals of novel-writing'.⁷⁴ In

The Makers of Florence Oliphant used Dante, Giotto and Savonarola to trace the history of Florence, writing of ‘the great figure of the Poet’ and of Dante as ‘the very embodiment, the living soul of Florence’.⁷⁵ Reviewers were not quite so damning: one praised the essay on Dante and her qualities as a storyteller though another referred to signs of haste.⁷⁶ Her novel, *The Little Pilgrim*, draws on Dante for the description of a woman entering the afterlife.⁷⁷ She knew Italy and travelled there and in her work on Dante appears to have had the assistance of her son, Francis.⁷⁸

Oliphant’s publishing career began in 1849 but the imperative to write for a living became more pressing when she was widowed with three children after only seven years of marriage and then took on the support of her brother and his three children. She became what she called a ‘general utility woman’.⁷⁹ She saw society through the emotions and moral values of the people in it, making figures such as Dante and Savonarola particularly appealing.⁸⁰ However, she had little time for the spiritual aspects of Dante’s work and concentrated upon his writing as literature, which she regarded as ‘a new beginning and a new starting point’ in European literature.⁸¹

Women writers in Britain extensively exploited Dante as a cultural product, pressing him into service in a wide variety of genres. Although there were no Dante birthday books to compliment the many Shakespeare birthday books, Blanche Mcmanus’s *Dante Calendar* of 1904 was produced by the De la More Press, a small company founded in about 1900 which lasted until the 1930s and was strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. Mcmanus was an American illustrator who produced for the same publisher other calendars to a formula with, on the left hand side, a line drawing and, on the right, the calendar, the title, verses from the relevant writing and an ornamental border. Mcmanus had also written and illustrated a series of books for children published in America about ‘our cousins’ from foreign nations.

There is no doubt of the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites and their Arts and Crafts descendants on this and other popular Dante publications. Mary Macgregor’s *Stories from Dante Told to the Children* 1909 draws on the Arts and Crafts movement for the aesthetic of the book, evidently designed to appeal to the high-minded parents who were to purchase it. Mary Hensman’s *Dante Map* was published by subscription with the Essex House Guild of Handicraft in 1892 and acknowledges the help of C.R. Ashbee, founder of the Guild of Handicraft in 1888 and an influential figure in the Arts and Crafts movement.

Dante was not, of course, a cultural product for women alone or for women only in Britain. Writing on Dante certainly made a considerable contribution to Foscolo’s survival, beset as he was by financial worries. Mazzini’s work on Dante presumably benefited both him and his translator, Geraldine Jewsbury. Women in America

produced a wide range of Dante material, though it tended to be the work of the better-known writers as Margaret Fuller, Julia Ward Howe and Louise Imogen Guiney that reached Britain.⁸²

Conclusion

Dante was a particularly suitable subject for the aspirational reading market of an upwardly mobile, post-1870 Education Act population, a market particularly exploited by women, even after the period when they began to get academic jobs, because their publications were taken less seriously. The significance of these women is that they represent a major contribution to the process of making Dante accessible through translation, popular versions of Dante for adults and aids to reading, spiritual works based on Dante, Dante's contribution to the literature of Italian liberation and children's book based on Dante. Dante contributed to their ability to be taken seriously as scholars, but also to being able to make a living from writing. These works form the hinterland of writing against which to set the appearance of Dante in the writing of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Anna Jameson, Vernon Lee, Christina Rossetti, Mary Shelley, and Fanny Trollope.

Notes

1 I am extremely grateful to Professor Nick Havely for his great help.

2 Although the learned interest in Dante predates this, Paget Toynbee dates the surge of popular interest in Dante to after 1844 when the first cheap edition of Cary's translation of the *Commedia* appeared. Toynbee 1921: vi.

3 The Oxford Dante Society had no female members between its foundation in 1876 and 1920, even though there were such women scholars in Oxford as Eleanor Jourdain who had published on the symbolism of the *Commedia* in 1902. Toynbee 1920.

4 Finn 1993: 167.

5 See Toynbee 1905 for a list of translations of Dante's works by woman. Balbo 1852, translated into English by Frances Joanna Bunbury, Lady Horner; Witte 1898, selected, translated and edited with introduction, notes and appendices by C. Mabel Lawrence and Philip H. Wicksteed (Lawrence was Wicksteed's daughter); *von Döllinger* 1890, translated by Margaret Warre. Rose E. Selfe translated Villani's chronicles, Villani 1896.

6 Sayer 1887.

7 Sayer 1897: 239. The publisher of this journal was the novelist Annie E. Holdsworth, author of a novel about Paolo and Francesca and later wife of Vernon Lee's half-brother.

8 *Athenaeum*, 6 August 1887: 174. Powell's annotated copy of *Convito* in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Oxford, Bodleian Library: Toynbee 2010) indicates clearly that he was author of this review.

9 *Saturday Review*, 11 June 1887: 851-2.

10 Hillard 1889: xv-xxxix.

11 Hillard (1889): lix.

12 *Academy*, 18 April 1889: 264.

13 *Athenaeum*, 15 June 1889: 753-5.

14 Wicksteed 1903: 445-6.

15 Jackson 1909: 4.

16 Henry Morley, 'Introduction' in Sayer 1887: 5.

17 Hillard 1889: lix.

18 See Toynbee 1905: 1-107 for a complete list of translations by women.

19 Ramsay 1863: 1, vii; Cunningham 1965: 108. Ramsay's publisher produced middle-brow leisure reading.

20 *Reader*, 14 November 1863: 569; *Saturday Review*, 14 November 1863: 654 ; *Athenaeum*, 4 April 1863: 542; 'Dante in English Terza Rima', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 101, June 1867: 736

21 Potter 1894; Potter 1899, preface.

22 *Athenaeum*, 29 August 1896: 288; *Academy*, 3 Sept 1904: 162.

23 Anna Jameson had translated passages from the *Vita Nuova* in Jameson 1829; de Meÿ 1902.

24 de Meÿ 1902: 117.

25 *Times*, 9 March 1914: 6.

26 Locock 1871.

27 *Examiner*, 28 October 1871: 1074; *Illustrated Review*, January 1874: 55.

28 The journal was founded in 1851 by Charlotte Yonge as an Anglican (and Oxford Movement) journal for young people; she continued to edit it until 1890. The denomination 'younger' was dropped in 1866.

29 *Monthly Packet*, 1 August 1894: 240. Butler was to use his *Monthly Packet* articles as the basis for *Dante: his Time and his Work*,

30 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* had been founded to counterbalance the Whig *Edinburgh Review*.

31 For example, 'Dante for the general by one of them', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1886: .660-81; 'Dante in English terza rima', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1867: 736-755. articles acknowledged as hers with discussion of Dante include 'Siena', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1898: 23-39.

32 Shore 1886: vi.

33 Wyld 1904: 4.

34 Castle 1907: 1.

35 Bugliani-Knox 1997: 226, 238.

36 Bainbrigge 1914: ix, viii.

37 Pite 1998: 90, 94; Milbank 1998: 131, 195.

38 Selfe 1900: Preface.

39 Cotes 1898: 89

40 She also wrote children's fiction as Marion Andrews.

41 Hare 1905: 2.

42 *Academy*, 14 October 1905: 1075-6.

43 *Academy*, 9 May 1914: 590

44 Hare 1914: 2. In the introduction the author says s/he wrote the book on the strength of the success of his/her life of Guilia Gonzaga, 'a princess of the Italian Reformation', published in 1912.

45 Birkhead (1913): 228

46 *Athenaeum* 10 June 1893: 727.

47 Gurney 1893): to the Reader.

48 Morse, ODNB.

49 Hodgkin 1902: 3.

50 Hensman 1892: 2.

51 Parry 2006: 245.

52 Mazzini in *Foreign Quarterly Review* 33 (April, 1844) quoted in Caesar 1989: 558.

53 Wicks 1937: 197.

54 The Society was disbanded in 1853, resurfacing under a variety of other names. Spain ODNB; Riall 2007: 142.

55 O'Connor 1998: 83; Rudman 1960: 124-33, 174.

56 Maxwell ODNB.

57 Lothian 1876: 2. p.249.

58 *Academy*, 15 January 1876: p.51.

59 Cross 1985: 167.

60 Chester 1895; Chester 1898; Underdown 1902; Underdown 1903; Underdown 1906.

61 Chester 1898: 3.

62 Chester 1898: 21.

63 Chester 1898: 24

64 Chester 1898: 14-5, Oxford, Bodleian Library: Toynbee 2910.

65 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 June 1898: 4.

66 Chester 1895: 1.

67 MacGregor 1907: Preface.

68 Macgregor 1907: 86.

69 Bellamy 2000: 143; D'Albertis 1998: 806.

70 Oliphant 1875.

71 Oliphant 1887 (and six further editions).

72 Coghill 1899: 189.

73 *Academy*, 14 July 1877: 310-1.

74 *Athenaeum*, 28 July 1877: 104.

75 Oliphant 1881: xiv, 2. The first edition appeared in 1876, followed by four further editions and many reprints.

76 *Examiner* 23 December 1876: 1442, 1443; *Athenaeum*, 6 January 1877: 14

77 Milbank 1998: 183.

78 Obituary, *Times*, 13 October 1894

79 Scriven 2007: 28; Bellamy 2000: 144.

80 Onlsow 1998: 56.

81 Oliphant 1877: 4.

82 La Piana 1948: 140-1.

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