

**A FREE TRANSLATION, IN  
VERSE, OF THE "INFERNO" OF  
DANTE, WITH A PRELIMINARY  
DISCOURSE AND NOTES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760574666

A Free Translation, in Verse, of the "Inferno" of Dante, with a Preliminary Discourse and Notes  
by Dante Alighieri & Bruce Whyte

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Cover @ 2017

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**DANTE ALIGHIERI & BRUCE WHYTE**

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THE  
"INFERNO" OF DANTE.  
A FREE TRANSLATION.

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IN VERSE,  
OF THE  
"INFERNO" OF DANTE,  
WITH A  
PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE AND NOTES.

BY  
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"A HISTORY OF THE ROMANCE TONGUES AND THEIR LITERATURE."

LONDON:  
WRIGHT AND CO., 60, PALL MALL,  
AND  
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, AND CO., STATIONERS' HALL COURT.  
1859.

288. c. 12.

## E R R A T A.

- ♦—
- Canto VII., page 29, line 28. Read—  
 "Then vouchsafe, my gracious master, to relate,"  
 Instead of  
 "Then vouchsafe, my master, to relate."
- Canto XVI., page 70, line 26. Read—  
 "Seeing he marks it with so fix'd a view,"  
 Instead of  
 "Seeing he makes it with so fix'd a view."
- Page 88, note 2. Read—  
 "Laggia caschero," for "Laggio caschero io."
- Page 119, note 3. Read—  
 "Così foss' a da che pure esser dee;  
 Che più mi graverà com' più m' attempo."  
 Instead of  
 "Così foss' a da che pure esser dee;  
 Che più mi graverà com' più m' attempo."
- Canto XXXII., page 144, line 28. Read—  
 "whose teeth betray'd,  
 "Like beaks of famished storks\*, their woful plight."  
 (\* La Fontaine's fable, "Le Renard et le Chigogne.")  
 Instead of  
 "stone teeth betray'd,  
 "Chattering like apes their miserable plight."
- Canto XXXIII., page 152, line 14. Read—  
 "Learn that this Ptolomy (our prison's name),"  
 Instead of  
 "Learn that this Ptolomy (our prisoner's name)."

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## PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

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It has been the singular fortune of Dante to have suffered more from the extravagant eulogium of most of his Italian commentators than from the severest criticism of foreigners. There is not a nauseous or indecent allusion, an obscure ellipsis, a prolix and irrelative description, a scholastic subtlety, a quaint or puerile conceit, in the "Divine Comedy" which the Biagiolis of Italy have not attempted to justify, which they do not extol, nay sometimes propose for imitation. What has been the consequence? The majority of readers, who peruse a poem not as a task but for amusement, finding these defects (and they are numerous) obtruded on notice and the objects of panegyric, are apt to infer that the poem contains nothing really worthy of admiration, and they discard it as a monstrous production of the middle age. Disgusted with the ogives, the minute and clustered columns, the niches overloaded with statues in some Gothic cathedral, they leave it without bestowing a thought on its grandeur and solidity. This is precisely what has happened to Dante. It is high time therefore to allow him to speak for himself, to read his poem without the aid of this class of commentators. We would especially warn the student against that love, or rather abuse, of allegory, which seems to have infected them like a contagious disease. Everybody knows that the three monsters which obstruct the poet's ascent up Mount Sion (if indeed that was its name) are a lion, a panther, and a she-wolf. Now these, the commentators assure us, are mere types—the first of ferocity, the second of sensuality, the third of avarice. Presumptuous as it may appear in an ultramontane to question the interpretation of so formidable a phalanx of diviners, we conceive that we are

justified in doing so by the authority of the poet himself, by the gratuitous and fanciful nature of the hypothesis, and by the danger of having recourse to allegory when the text bears a clear and definite sense. But it is evident that the force of these objections depends in a great measure on the view which we take of the "Divine Comedy." If it be considered as a mere fiction, every reader would be at liberty to put his own construction on it; it would be a tale without a moral, a vision which might be variously interpreted without compromising personages or things. Thus considered, the transcendent merits of the work vanish. If we would duly appreciate its importance, we must for a moment forget that it is fictitious. We must assume that Dante actually visited the eternal regions, that each incident is a literal fact. Why then allegorize the beasts in question? in other words, why sacrifice the savage guardians of the mountain to the vague phantoms of imagination? Virgil, alluding to the deliverance of Italy by Candella Scala, lord of Verona, says distinctly of the she-wolf—

" Questa la caccerà per ogni villa  
 Fin che l' avra remessa nello' inferno  
 La onde invidia primo departilla."

Canto i.

Can there be a doubt then that all the three monsters had been despatched from Hell by Lucifer to prevent virtuous and pious souls ascending the mountain of bliss? Why have recourse to allegory? The beasts amply suffice to guard it. If the figure means anything, it implies that Dante was impeded in his ascent by the vices typified, yet not one of his numerous biographers affords the least reason to suppose that he was addicted to any of them. He was vindictive and irascible in the extreme, but not ferocious. Instead of being voluptuous, his whole life was a series of hardships and privations; he himself feelingly adverts to the misery of being

dependent on the bread of strangers for our support. He had not a tincture of avarice in his character. Consequently, the above vices could not have impeded his ascent.

In the name of common sense then, let us interpret the words in their literal meaning; and when the poet specifies a lion, a panther, and she-wolf, let us conclude that they were such indeed. We have dwelt the longer on this point because this very passion for allegory has induced most of the commentators to denaturalize one of the noblest and most interesting personages in the poem. We refer to their endeavour to persuade us that Beatrice is the type or symbol of theology. As portrayed by Dante, she is a model of virtue, tenderness, constancy, intellectual wisdom, and unremitting solicitude concerning his welfare. At an early period of their lives, a mutual passion united their hearts; and, notwithstanding his expulsion from Florence, embittered by the confiscation of his paternal fortune, her affection for him never suffered the slightest diminution; it seems on the contrary to have increased with his misfortunes, and to have survived her premature death. In Paradise she watches over all the vicissitudes incident to his career—she anticipates impending dangers; consults with her fellow spirits, Rachel and Lucia, on the best means of averting them; she quits her celestial mansion and visits the infernal regions in quest of a spirit capable of conducting him in the perilous expedition which he was permitted, or destined, to accomplish; in a word, she becomes his guardian angel. Such was Beatrice. But when she is allegorized into the type of theology, the whole interest which she inspired vanishes; the brilliant colours of the portrait fade, and nothing remains but a meagre outline which affects us no more than a scholastic treatise on that science. It is scarcely credible to what absurdities this abuse of allegory has carried certain learned professors and popular commentators.