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The Divine Comedy: The Unabridged Classic (Vintage Classics)



Synopsis

The complete Divine Comedy (Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso) in one volume from Vintage Classics. The greatest poem of the Middle Ages, in the standard Carlyle-Okey-Wickstead translation, with full notes. Dante's Divine Comedy relates the allegorical tale of the poet's journey through the three realms of the dead. Accompanied through the Inferno and Purgatory by Virgil, "author of the Roman epic the Aeniad," Dante encounters mythical, historical, and contemporaneous figures in their respective afterlives. Relying on classical (pagan) mythology and Christian imagery and theology, Dante imagines diverse vivid and inventive punishments for the various sinners he encounters, which have become part of the Western imagination. Upon their approach to Paradise, which as a pagan, no matter how worthy, the Latin poet cannot enter, Virgil relinquishes his role as guide to Beatrice. Dante's chaste beloved then accompanies him along the ascent, as they encounter the blessed and the holy, and Dante arrives at a vision of the heavenly paradise.

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Customer Reviews

This Everyman edition of Allen Mandelbaum's superb translation of Dante's DIVINE COMEDY is my favorite one-volume edition currently in print in English. There are many very, very good things to say about this translation and edition. First and perhaps foremost, it contains Mandelbaum's remarkable translation of Dante, a translation often noted for being the best compromise between poetic rhythm, beauty, and accuracy. Of recent translations, the only one that I like as much as

Mandelbaum's is Pinsky's great translation of the INFERNO, but unfortunately he has not, as has Mandelbaum, gone on to translate the entirety of Dante's masterpiece. Though Pinsky's translation is renowned for following the terza rima rhyme pattern, it actually reads more like a prose translation, primarily because he observes no meter for each line (Dante's original has eleven syllables per line, precisely like Shakespeare's famous line, "To be or not to be, that is the question"). Mandelbaum observes neither meter nor rhyme, but I personally find more of a poetic concentration of language than one finds in Pinsky. Most of all, Mandelbaum's translation is, like Pinsky's, highly readable and extremely dynamic. Until and if Pinsky completes his translation, Mandelbaum is likely to remain my favorite translation of Dante in English (though happily there are a host of very good translations, including those by Huse, Sinclair, and Singleton). The volume is remarkably attractive, with a lovely dust jacket (not shown in the book photo), covers wrapped in cloth, non-acidic, nonreflective paper, and a ribbon bookmark. Also, the volume features a large number of Botticelli's illustrations of Dante, which obviously adds immensely to its value and its attractiveness. Also enhancing the volume's value is the marvelous introductory essay by Eugenio Montale and the comprehensive notes by Peter Armour. The only conceivable criticism of this volume is the absence of the Italian original, but that is not to be too regretted since its presence would have required so many additional pages that it would have been an unwieldy and unusable volume. One can get the Mandelbaum translation in either mass market paperback or hardback editions featuring each part with facing Italian. The final thing to note is that one gets all these features in what is a very reasonably priced volume. I think for most readers of Dante, this is going to be the single volume of choice. Indeed, unless one especially wants the Italian text facing the English, this might be the edition of choice under any circumstances. The one edition that is clearly the supreme edition of Dante in English, that of Charles Singleton published by Princeton, is simply too expensive for all but the most serious readers of Dante. I will merely add that this is probably one of my favorite editions of any classic in my personal library. Obviously, I strongly recommend this version to anyone contemplating either reading or rereading Dante.

Since it is given that Dante's Divine Comedy is one of the most important works of Western Literature, my review will focus on the translation rather than the original. Mandelbaum's translation was good, but not great. His greatest strength is that he maintains a strong sense of readability throughout most of the text. Although he does occasionally lapse into confusing grammatical structures in order to maintain the form of the poem, these are rare and do not detract from the reading to too great of an extent. However, what is lost in this translation at times, is the sense of

poetry and pacing that are so crucial to Dante. This is not entirely his fault, however. In this edition of his work, there is no white space between each triplet of the poem. This, coupled with Mandelbaum's not having made any attempt to reflect terza rima in his translation, disrupts the flow of the original. While this is a small complaint, it does keep Mandelbaum's translation from achieving the brilliance of Pinsky and Merwin. However, Mandelbaum does have one advantage over those other two translators: he does the entire Comedy. While Pinsky's Inferno and Merwin's Purgatorio are superior to the same works in Mandelbaum's hands, Mandelbaum's translation is, in my opinion, the finest complete translation available. The glossing of the book is also strong, but, like the translation, does contain a few flaws. The notes are very thorough, but sometimes gloss the obvious, which can be quite tedious. Also, I would have preferred a higher quality of paper and print. While I realize that this series of books is intended to be inexpensive, a work with the length and depth of the Comedy warrants the extra expense necessary to make the reading experience less arduous. So, while I would recommend this edition to anyone just getting started on Dante (it was my first), serious Dante scholars might want to look elsewhere. The strengths of this volume (not the least of which is that it has the entire Comedy, rather than just a third) make it a worthwhile addition to the body of Dante translations, but it lacks any one tremendous strength to set it apart from the others.

I am, and have been for many a year, a scholar of the works of Dante. Coming up to date, I have read thousands of translations of the text of all three parts of the Divine comedy, and this is the best I have found yet. First of all, it is a treat to find that all three parts of this master work are collected in this one volume, and even though the price is quite low for a hardcover book with as many pages as this, I cannot stress the quality of this edition. As many may know, Dante Alighieri was a man of great literary prowess, but was given drive by his single obsession to a small girl by the name of Beatrice. She rings true in this work, as the guiding angel, bringing Dante through the depths of hell, the wasteland of Purgatory, and finally, the glory of heaven. This has been one of the most enduring works on the human spirit, and the concept of god as seen through Christianity. Full of pun and metaphor, this is rich in language, and ready to please. Some people start their studies of Epic Poetry with Milton's "Paradise lost," but I say, speaking from experience, that Dante is far superior to Milton, but Milton is in good company as his second. I have read the original in Italian, and this is about as close of a translation as you can get. Please enjoy this.

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