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The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso (Penguin Classics)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

DANTE

*The Divine Comedy:
Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*

Translated by ROBIN KIRKPATRICK



Synopsis

Robin Kirkpatrick's masterful verse translation of *The Divine Comedy*, tracing Dante's journey from Hell to Purgatory and finally Paradise, is published here for the first time in a single volume. The volume includes a new introduction, notes, maps and diagrams, and is the ideal edition for students as well as the general reader who is coming to the great masterpiece of Italian literature for the first time. *The Divine Comedy* describes Dante's descent into Hell with Virgil as a guide; his ascent of Mount Purgatory and encounter with his dead love, Beatrice; and finally, his arrival in Heaven. Examining questions of faith, desire and enlightenment, the poem is a brilliantly nuanced and moving allegory of human redemption. 'The perfect balance of tightness and colloquialism... likely to be the best modern version of Dante' - Bernard O'Donoghue 'The most moving lines literature has achieved' - Jorge Luis Borges 'This version is the first to bring together poetry and scholarship in the very body of the translation - a deeply-informed version of Dante that is also a pleasure to read' - Professor David Wallace, University of Pennsylvania Individual editions of Robin Kirkpatrick's translation - *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* - are also available in Penguin Classics, and include Dante's Italian printed alongside the English text. Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in 1265 and belonged to a noble but impoverished family. His life was divided by political duties and poetry, the most famous of which was inspired by his meeting with Bice Portinari, whom he called Beatrice, including *La Vita Nuova* and *The Divine Comedy*. He died in Ravenna in 1321. Robin Kirkpatrick is a poet and widely-published Dante scholar. He has taught courses on Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Hong Kong, Dublin, and Cambridge where is Fellow of Robinson College and Professor of Italian and English Literatures.

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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.

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.

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