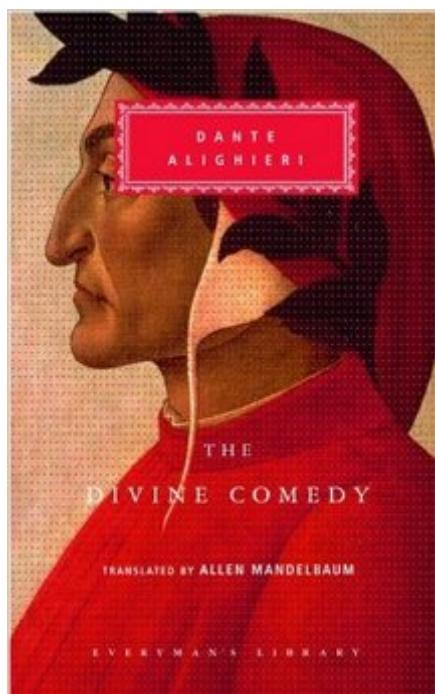


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The Divine Comedy: Inferno; Purgatorio; Paradiso (Everyman's Library)



Synopsis

The Divine Comedy, translated by Allen Mandelbaum, begins in a shadowed forest on Good Friday in the year 1300. It proceeds on a journey that, in its intense recreation of the depths and the heights of human experience, has become the key with which Western civilization has sought to unlock the mystery of its own identity. Mandelbaum's astonishingly Dantean translation, which captures so much of the life of the original, renders whole for us the masterpiece of that genius whom our greatest poets have recognized as a central model for all poets. This Everyman's edition—“containing in one volume all three cantos, Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso”—includes an introduction by Nobel Prize-winning poet Eugenio Montale, a chronology, notes, and a bibliography. Also included are forty-two drawings selected from Botticelli's marvelous late-fifteenth-century series of illustrations. (Book Jacket Status: Jacketed)

Book Information

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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 INFERN, 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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