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Inferno: The Divine Comedy I



PENGUIN CLASSICS

DANTE

Inferno



Synopsis

Describing Dante's descent into Hell midway through his life with Virgil as a guide, *Inferno* depicts a cruel underworld in which desperate figures are condemned to eternal damnation for committing one or more of seven deadly sins. As he descends through nine concentric circles of increasingly agonising torture, Dante encounters doomed souls including the pagan Aeneas, the liar Odysseus, the suicide Cleopatra, and his own political enemies, damned for their deceit. Led by leering demons, the poet must ultimately journey with Virgil to the deepest level of all. For it is only by encountering Satan, in the heart of Hell, that he can truly understand the tragedy of sin.

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Customer Reviews

About twenty years ago I read Dorothy Sayers's translation of Dante's "Divine Comedy" with great pleasure, finding an awesome grandeur in Dante's progression from Hell through Purgatory to Heaven. When I decided to re-read the work, I found the poetry tortured and the references obscure. So I went comparison shopping, settling on Mark Musa's version. He created an excellent, free-flowing, poetic, and easily understandable translation of the three canticles of Dante's "Divine

Comedy" for Penguin Classics. In addition to the direct translation, Musa provides an introductory summary to each canto, detailed notes following each canto, a glossary of names in the back of each volume, and an introductory essay for each volume. The introduction to "Volume 1: Inferno" gives a thorough introduction to Dante and to his other works as well as to the Inferno. Following the introduction is a translator's note. The introductions to "Purgatory" and "Paradise" do not go over the extra information presented in "Inferno". It is useful to read all three of Dante's canticles in the Musa translation to get a complete, consistent presentation of the work. Musa does make reference in his notes to one volume to ideas or people presented in the others. The notes are vital for almost everyone. The references to Biblical, classical, and medieval personalities, myths, time systems, theology, and events come frequently. Few people are up on the ins and outs of Guelf vs. Ghibelline in medieval Italian politics. Musa makes it all as clear as it needs to be. Musa's version of "Inferno" italicizes the introductory summary before each canticle and retains the detailed, interesting mappings of Hell used in the Sayers edition. Dante's poem is central to Western civilization.

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