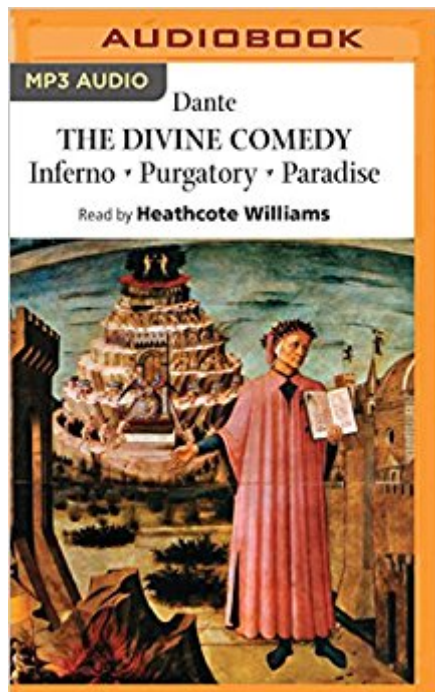


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The Divine Comedy



Synopsis

Dante's vision, *The Divine Comedy*, has profoundly affected every generation since it first appeared in the early fourteenth century. The box set contains the trilogy of *The Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*, plus a biography of Dante—*A Life of Dante*—which puts the very personal nature of his poetry into perspective.

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Customer Reviews

Critic extraordinaire James (Cultural Amnesia, 2007) is also a poet (*Opal Sunset: Selected Poems*, 2008), and he has been working his way to this daring project ever since he was in Florence in the mid-1960s while studying at Cambridge, as he explains in his rousing introduction. His companion, whom he would soon marry, the future Dante scholar Prudence Shaw, revealed to him the “great secret of Dante’s masterpiece,” the fact that it possesses both “interior intensity” and propulsion. How, James wondered, could a translator re-create this dynamic? Deciding that Dante’s *terza rima* is too strained in English, he uses robust, rollicking quatrains. He also avoids footnotes, which so rudely interrupt the flow and drama of this defining classic, by working necessary explanations into the poem itself. James’s revitalizing translation allows this endlessly analyzed, epic, archetypal “journey to salvation” to once again stride, whirl, blaze, and sing. Anyone heretofore reluctant to pick up *The Divine Comedy* will discover that James’s bold, earthy, rhythmic and rhyming, all-the-way live English translation fulsomely and brilliantly liberates the profound humanity of Dante’s timeless masterpiece. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to an out of print or

unavailable edition of this title.

Long narrative poem originally titled *Commedia* (about 1555 printed as *La divina commedia*) written about 1310-14 by Dante. The work is divided into three major sections--*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*--which trace the journey of a man from darkness and error to the revelation of the divine light, culminating in the beatific vision of God. It is usually held to be one of the world's greatest works of literature. The plot of *The Divine Comedy* is simple: a man is miraculously enabled to visit the souls in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. He has two guides: Virgil, who leads him through the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and Beatrice, who introduces him to *Paradiso*. Through these fictional encounters taking place from Good Friday evening in 1300 through Easter Sunday and slightly beyond, Dante the character learns of the exile that is awaiting him (an actual exile that had already occurred at the time of writing). This device allowed Dante not only to create a story out of his exile but also to explain how he came to cope with personal calamity and to offer suggestions for the resolution of Italy's troubles as well. Thus, Dante's story is historically specific as well as paradigmatic; his exile serves as a microcosm of the problems of a country, and it also becomes representative of the Fall of Man. The basic structural component of *The Divine Comedy* is the canto. The poem consists of 100 cantos, which are grouped into the three major sections, or canticles. Technically there are 33 cantos in each canticle and one additional canto, contained in the *Inferno*, that serves as an introduction to the entire poem. For the most part the cantos range from 136 to 151 lines. The poem's rhyme scheme is the *terza rima* (aba, bcb, cdc, etc.) Thus, the divine number three is present in every part of the work. Dante adopts the classical convention of a visit to the land of the dead, but he adapts it to a Christian worldview by beginning his journey there. The *Inferno* represents a false start during which Dante, the character, must be disabused of harmful values that somehow prevent him from rising above his fallen world. Despite the regressive nature of the *Inferno*, Dante's meetings with the damned are among the most memorable moments of the poem: the Neutrals, the virtuous pagans, Francesca da Rimini, Filippo Argenti, Farinata degli Uberti, Piero delle Vigne, Brunetto Latini, the simoniacal popes, Ulysses, and Ugolino impose themselves upon the reader's imagination with tremendous force. Nonetheless, the journey through the *Inferno* primarily signifies a process of separation and thus is only the initial step in a fuller development. In the *Purgatorio* the protagonist's spiritual rehabilitation commences. There Dante subdues his own personality so that he will be able to ascend. He comes to accept the essential Christian image of life as a pilgrimage, and he joins the other penitents on the road of life. At the summit of Purgatory, where repentant sinners are purged of their sins, Virgil departs, having led

Dante as far as human knowledge is able--to the threshold of Paradise. Beatrice, who embodies the knowledge of divine mysteries bestowed by Grace, continues Dante's tour. In the Paradiso true heroic fulfillment is achieved. Dante's poem gives expression to those figures from the past who seem to defy death and who inspire in their followers a feeling of exaltation and a desire for identification. The Paradiso is consequently a poem of fulfillment and of completion. --The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I've read The Divine Comedy several times, in different translations, but I have always found Paradise a slog. I'm happy to report that Clive James has made even this abstract exploration of light and doctrine (and, I might add, occasionally smug self-righteousness on Dante's part) a fascinating journey. James has chosen an unusual verse form - quatrains, with an abab rhyme scheme - to translate this, but it works well: it moves quickly and smoothly, each line pulling you forward to the next. I'm sure the labor was intensive, but most of the time the word order, the rhythm, the rhymes all fall into place as if they just happened that way. It unfolds naturally. And James has extended the verse in places by filling in some of the oblique references Dante makes. You can read it without having to flip back and forth between notes, which is a good thing, because there aren't any. There are risks in bringing notes into the verse itself: some references in the poem are ambiguous; which do you pick? James tries to stick close to scholarly consensus, where there is any. For example, the "one who made the great refusal" is identified in the verse as Pope Celestine: if you have to pick one among many, that IS the closest to a scholarly consensus; but purists would argue against closing off other possibilities. If that bothers you, this is not the translation for you. But if you've never read Dante before, I would definitely recommend starting here. My one complaint is that the quatrains are not separated by a space. I don't know whether this was James's decision or the publisher's. I suppose it was an effort to increase the forward momentum and call less attention to the formal structure. Just a personal preference on my part; in no way does it detract from the readability of the poem. (In case this review floats around, the way they sometimes do on , I should clarify that I'm describing the 2013 translation by Clive James.)

There seem to be many jumbled reviews of many different editions and translations of the Divine Comedy. This is in reference to the Knickerbocker cloth bound edition of the Divine Comedy by the Longfellow translation with Doré's illustrations included. I've been looking for a high quality edition of the Divine Comedy for a number of months now. This is the second one I've found not

entirely satisfactory (I first picked up a leather-bound edition at a brick & mortar bookstore, and very soon after returned it, for the same reason I am about to describe here). The book's construction is indeed beautiful, but the major shortcoming is with respect to the printing of Gustave Doré's engravings, which happen to be a large part of why I was interested in this volume. The reproduction of the engravings is of low quality, and in many of them the exquisite detail is not even clearly visible. My guess is the pictures were printed from computer-prepared facsimiles, and as such they exhibit the jaggy "copy-of-a-copy" artifactualing, along with an unsightly moiré effect in many of the backgrounds. Again, the exterior of the book is truly gorgeous, but it's what's inside that counts. The poor quality of these illustrations cost this overall rating of mine two stars. I would prefer a paperback edition with top quality illustrations. I would even resort to two volumes, the text in one and the engravings in another, if that was the way to ensure I could have Doré's artwork in the vivid, glorious detail it really deserves.

I bought these 3 volumes for a course, which was then postponed indefinitely. But since I'd already started reading, I kept at it. I'd tried reading/studying the Divine Comedy before, without success - too dry. The translator of this version is just excellent, presenting the text in a beautiful flowing, readable English.

I purchased this ebook as a result of an excellent review in the Saturday, April 19th WSJ talking about the qualities of this trilogy to help someone, basically, from despair to health. The review began with the first book which SHOULD be The Inferno and works the reader through the reasons for despair, then moving upward to Purgatory and finally into Paradise. But this book goes in the opposite direction and isn't what I expected nor, I fear, what the author intended. I am going to send it back if possible and order another translation in the expected order.

Truly a classic of the Medieval period, a great insight into Italian culture and politics. Also a fun read if one is interested in Dante's perception of the circles of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, and the punishments/rewards at each, but the work is primarily a political one, and is much easier to understand if one has an understanding of Medieval politics. For example, certain political (and Church!) figures are placed at certain levels in Hell (and Heaven) for their specific deeds, and understanding their actual actions may help one better understand Dante's motivation in creating such punishments in such circles. However, even if one does not wish to do such research, it is an interesting read nonetheless!

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