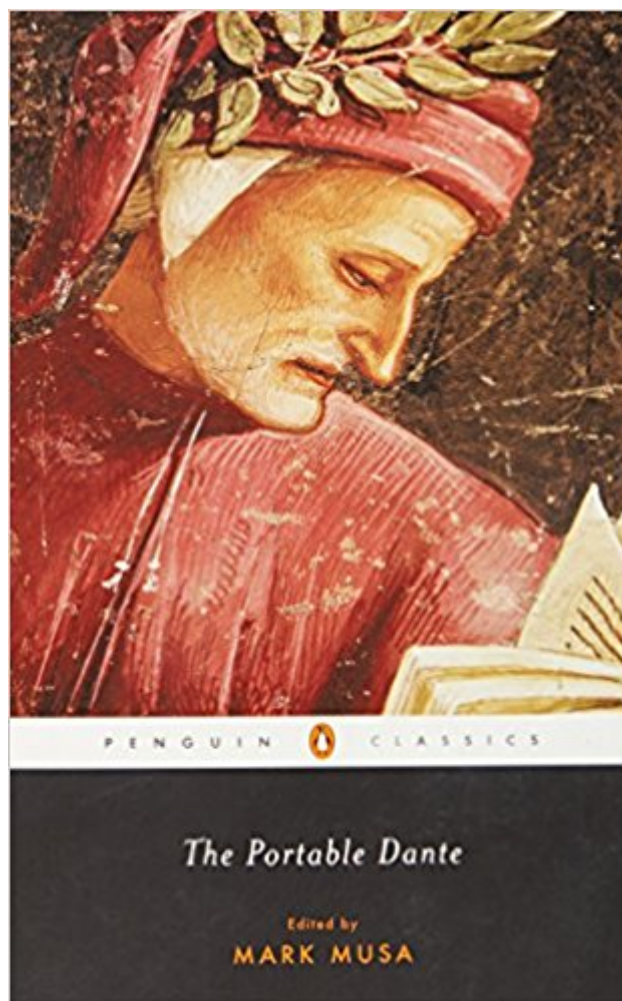


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The Portable Dante (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Dante Alighieri paved the way for modern literature, while creating verse and prose that remain unparalleled for formal elegance, intellectual depth, and emotional grandeur. The Portable Dante contains complete verse translations of Dante's two masterworks, *The Divine Comedy* and *La Vita Nuova*, as well as a bibliography, notes, and an introduction by eminent scholar and translator Mark Musa. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 704 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Reissue edition (July 29, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0142437549

ISBN-13: 978-0142437544

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1.2 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (36 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

First, a word about Mark Musa's translation of Dante's works. His interpretations of the *Divine Comedy* and *La Vita Nuova* are very beautiful, extremely readable, and as true to Dante as you can be in English. Musa's scholarship is excellent, and his introductory essays on Dante and his works are a pleasure to read, offering a broad understanding of what Dante is all about. However, it is important that you keep in mind that a number of concessions had to be made for this book. Collecting the massive poems of the *Divine Comedy*, along with *La Vita Nuova*, is no mean task -

I'm astounded Penguin Classics pulled it off in such a compact and readable volume. But this collection comes at the expense of some features that range from minor to outright baffling. First, the minor stuff. This edition lacks the informative diagrams and illustrations of the standalone Divine Comedy volumes from Penguin Classics (*Inferno*, et al). Given the complexity of Dante's creation, it is very helpful to have maps to show you where the various parts of the afterlife are, and who inhabits them. Puzzlingly, *The Portable Dante* includes a detailed map of Purgatory, but only a very vague and un-labeled map of *Inferno*, and NO map of *Paradiso* and the celestial spheres. Very strange and disappointing. More unfortunate is the lack of a glossary. The Penguin Classics *Inferno* has an excellent glossary of people and places that appear in the poem. This is a phenomenal resource for figuring out who is where in Hell, what they represent, and what Dante is doing with them. However, the most (potentially) major issue with this volume is the sparse commentary. The individual books of *The Divine Comedy* have extensive endnotes, detailing broad sections and individual passages in great detail.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is one of the greatest works of an individual author in the history of literature. I did my undergraduate thesis on a topic in it, so I guess I could be a little biased. I'm not reviewing the *Commedia*, but the Musa edition. My director, an expert in Medieval Studies (Toronto Ph.D., Notre Dame professor), preferred this edition because it attempts to capture Dante's meaning, and is best equipped of the English translations to do that. It doesn't attempt to replicate his meter or rhyme, which we wouldn't be able to do without significant damage to the text. It's also not a translation based on other translations for the most fluid reading (Pinsky). Musa is specifically a scholar of medieval Italian. While I consulted Mandelbaum, he is foremost a poet/translator. His work is impressive as such, but a lot of the philosophical or theological finesse is lost when reading his translation. Not being contrived, I find Musa still compelling to read. He lets Dante speak for himself, mostly, and that's a tremendous attribute in a translator. If you want the full impact of the beauty, you had better start learning Italian. But if you seek to grasp the plot and basic meaning of Dante, this book is what you're looking for. The book design is very good. I got tons of use out of this paperback, but it never fell apart and didn't show much wear and tear. The pages are soft on the eyes and are of good enough quality to write on (which I did a lot!). As others have mentioned, having footnotes at the bottom is much better than having to flip to the back (Mandelbaum) or use another book (Singleton). Don't be afraid to consult these notes or read the canto introductions, you will find that these will help your reading, not serve as crutches.

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