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Inferno (Modern Library Classics)



Synopsis

Translated by Anthony Esolen | Illustrations by Gustave Doré | A groundbreaking bilingual edition of Dante's masterpiece that includes a substantive Introduction, extensive notes, and appendixes that reproduce Dante's key sources and influences.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dante's Divine Comedy is one of the great works of world literature. T. S. Eliot famously asserted that Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world: "there is no third". Hence "Commedia", christened "divina" by Boccaccio, earns five stars - there isn't any debate. Professor Esolen's 2002 version, published by Modern Library, doesn't attempt the intricacies of Commedia's musical terza rima, which is virtually impossible to achieve in English without semantical distortions. Prof Esolen employs blank verse with irregular rhymes, which ought to bring about a virtue of faithfulness to the original text. Looking at Prof Esolen's first Canto, however, might bring some problems to some preferring a more literal approach. Prof Esolen can be too free in his rendition, at least to me, resulting in some semantic shifts which aren't found in the original. In the opening Canto, Dante finds himself in a "selva oscura", which means "dark/obscure woods/forest". "Selva", according to the Italian dictionary, means "forest" or "woods". This is the wording employed by the vast majority of Inferno translations. Prof Esolen opts for "wilderness", which may mean "forest", "desert" or "a tract of wasteland". The American Heritage Dictionary defines "wilderness" as "a large wild tract of land

covered with dense vegetation or forests", or, "an extensive area, such as a desert or ocean, that is barren or empty; a waste". There is dual meaning: the semantics for wilderness in most parts of the world still means "a desolate uncultivated tract" eg. in the 2011 NIV John the Baptist still preached "in the wilderness". Under the Ptolemaic system during Dante's time the sun was a "planet" (Italian: pianeta). Prof Esolen translates this as "wandering light of Heaven".

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