



The Inferno

By Dante

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The Inferno By Dante

The epic grandeur of Dante's masterpiece has inspired readers for 700 years, and has entered the human imagination. But the further we move from the late medieval world of Dante, the more a rich understanding and enjoyment of the poem depends on knowledgeable guidance. Robert Hollander, a renowned scholar and master teacher of Dante, and Jean Hollander, an accomplished poet, have written a beautifully accurate and clear verse translation of the first volume of Dante's epic poem, the Divine Comedy. Featuring the original Italian text opposite the translation, this edition also offers an extensive and accessible introduction and generous commentaries that draw on centuries of scholarship as well as Robert Hollander's own decades of teaching and research. The Hollander translation is the new standard in English of this essential work of world literature.

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The Inferno By Dante **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Translation is always an imperfect art, demanding from its practitioners a level of dual fidelity that even a seasoned bigamist would envy. And no work of art has prompted more in the way of earnest imperfection than Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Transforming those intricate, rhyme-rich tercets into English has been the despair of many a distinguished translator, from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to W.S. Merwin (whose estimable rendition of *Purgatorio* found the poet rattling over more than one linguistic speed bump). Now comes a fresh rendition of the *Inferno* from a husband-and-wife team. Robert Hollander, who has taught Dante for nearly four decades at Princeton, supplies the scholarly muscle, while his wife, poet Jean Hollander, attends to the verbal music.

How does their collaboration stack up? In his introduction, Robert Hollander is quick to acknowledge his debt to John D. Sinclair's prose trot of 1939, and to the version that Charles Singleton derived largely from his predecessor's in 1970. Yet the Hollanders have done us all a favor by throwing Sinclair's faux medievalisms overboard. And their predilection for direct, monosyllabic English sometimes brings them much closer to Dante's asperity and rhythmic urgency. One example will suffice. In the last line of Canto V, after listening to Francesca's adulterous aria, the poet faints: "*E caddi come corpo morto cade.*" Sinclair's rendering---"I swooned as if in death and dropped like a dead body"--has a kind of conditional mushiness to it. Compare the punchier rendition from the Hollanders: "And down I fell as a dead body falls." It sounds like an actual line of English verse, which is the least we can do for the supreme poet of our beleaguered civilization.

Robert Hollander has also supplied an extensive and very welcome commentary. There are times, perhaps, when he might have broken ranks with his academic ancestors: why not deviate from Giorgio Petrocchi's 1967 edition of the Italian text when he thinks that the great scholar was barking up the wrong tree? In any case, the Hollanders' *Inferno* is a fine addition to the burgeoning bookshelf of Dante in English. It won't displace the relatively recent verse translations by Robert Pinsky or Allen Mandelbaum, and even John Ciardi's version, which sometimes substitutes breeziness for accuracy, can probably hold its own here. But when it comes to high fidelity and exegetical generosity, this *Inferno* burns brightly indeed. --James Marcus

From Publishers Weekly

The opening canzone of Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy has appeared in almost every imaginable variety of English translation: prose, blank verse and iambic pentameter; unrhymed or in terza rima; with and without the original Italian; with commentary ranging from a few notes to a full separate volume. The translations have been produced by poets, scholars and poet-scholars. In the past six years alone, six new translations of the Inferno have appeared (including Robert Pinsky's 1994 rendition for FSG) and at least 10 others remain in print, including Allen Mandelbaum's celebrated 1980 translation (Univ. of Calif. Press and Bantam) and the extensively annotated editions of Charles Singleton (Princeton Univ. Press) and Mark Musa (Univ. of Indiana Press), the latter two unlikely to be surpassed soon in terms of extensiveness of commentary. Dante scholar Robert Hollander and the poet Jean Hollander bring to this crowded market a new translation of the Inferno that, remarkably, is by no means redundant and will for many be the definitive edition for the foreseeable future. The heart of the Hollanders' edition is the translation itself, which nicely balances the precision required for a much-interpreted allegory and the poetic qualities that draw most readers to the work. The result is a terse, lean Dante with its own kind of beauty. While Mandelbaum's translation begins "When I had journeyed half of our life's way,/ I found myself within a shadowed forest,/ for I had lost the path that does not stray," the Hollanders' rendition reads: "Midway in the journey of our

life/ I came to myself in a dark wood,/ for the straight way was lost." While there will be debate about the relative poetic merit of this new translation in comparison to the accomplishments of Mandelbaum, Pinsky, Zappulla and others, the Hollanders' lines will satisfy both the poetry lover and scholar; they are at once literary, accessible and possessed of the seeming transparency that often characterizes great translations. The Italian text is included on the facing page for easy reference, along with notes drawing on some 60 Dante scholars, several indexes, a list of works cited and an introduction by Robert Hollander. General readers, students and scholars will all find their favorite circles within this layered text.

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From Library Journal

Inferno is the first of the three books of The Divine Comedy being freshly translated by the Hollanders, with Purgatorio and Paradiso scheduled for release in 2002. This edition offers their interpretation on the right-hand page with Dante's original Italian text on the left. Robert Hollander has a very esteemed reputation as a translator of Dante and others, so this no doubt would be a worthy addition to literature collections already possessing previous versions.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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