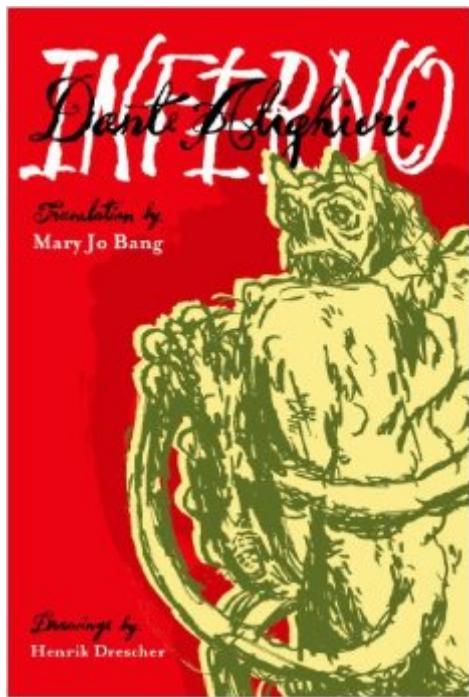


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Inferno: A New Translation



Synopsis

An innovative and fascinating new version of Dante Alighieri's Inferno as it has never been rendered. Stopped mid-motion in the middle Of what we call a life, I looked up and saw no sky-Only a dense cage of leaf, tree, and twig. I was lost. --from Canto I

Award-winning poet Mary Jo Bang has translated the Inferno into English at a moment when popular culture is so prevalent that it has even taken Dante, author of the fourteenth century epic poem, The Divine Comedy, and turned him into an action-adventure video game hero. Dante, a master of innovation, wrote his poem in the vernacular, rather than in literary Latin. Bang has similarly created an idiomatically rich contemporary version that is accessible, musical, and audacious. She's matched Dante's own liberal use of allusion and literary borrowing by incorporating literary and cultural references familiar to contemporary readers: Shakespeare and Dickinson, Freud and South Park, Kierkegaard and Stephen Colbert. The Inferno--the allegorical story of a spiritual quest that begins in a dark forest, traverses Hell's nine circles, and ends at the hopeful edge of purgatory--was also an indictment of religious hypocrisy and political corruption. In its time, the poem was stunningly new. Bang's version is true to the original: lyrical, politically astute, occasionally self-mocking, and deeply moving. With haunting illustrations by Henrik Drescher, this is the most readable Inferno available in English, a truly remarkable achievement.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've tried to make it to the center of Hades before but never completed the journey. With Mary Jo Bang's new translation, I was successful, and I am glad I made the trip. Bang is a professor at

Washington University in St Louis, and she brings her considerable talent with words to bear to create a very contemporary translation. There are many references and allusions that would not have been possible with a literal translation of Dante's work -- flashbulbs, war criminals, rock lyrics, even South Park -- but yet those references feel true to the heart of the story. The war criminals, for example, are translated from Italian names, most of which would have had no contemporary understanding, into similar sounding names of people that surely would have a proper place in their respective locations in Hell. While the original Italian is not included, that can easily be found elsewhere. For each canto, Bang includes a set of footnotes that explain both the historical references and the contemporary references. The author's literary background gives her the knowledge to translate phrases from Dante into phrases that echo great authors since, such as Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and others. If Dante had known those people, I feel certain he would have used those quotes himself. The illustrations by Henrik Drescher are well-tied to the text, and they are distinctive, sort of an ink-sketches-from-the-underworld style that illustrates the story with specific referents to this translation. While I would not choose to have this style hanging on the wall of my living room, it works well with this book and adds to the experience. If a strictly literal interpretation is what you are looking for, you'll have to look elsewhere. But for a very enjoyable and readable interpretation, with excellent background material to facilitate a true understanding, I can highly recommend Mary Jo Bang.

When I was a senior in high school, I didn't make it through Dante's Inferno. I don't remember which translation it was but it was boring and difficult to wade through. Fast forward 20 years and now I'm teaching Senior English to a group of tweeting, texting, and technology driven high school students with attention spans that are consistent with a tweet's character restrictions. The Inferno is on the syllabus and I wanted to find a translation that was refreshing but not unfaithful, accessible but not simplistic. I took a chance and bought Bang's translation hoping to find what I'd read in the reviews...it is safe to say that Dante is alive and well and INTERESTING! It's fun to read and explain the imagery in class. Students are taken aback by his descriptions and Bang's exacting diction. The best was when we had to figure out what a bitch-kitty was in Canto I. Love it.

Mary Jo Bang's translation of the Inferno is a modern "Dolce Stil Novo"--with allusions to contemporary poems and pop culture, it situates the medieval concerns of Dante's characters, both human and infernal, in a thoroughly present-day style. Her version makes a wonderful, often very funny, companion to the more traditional translations of the Commedia.

This is not a replacement for reading a more traditional translation, but it's a twist on Inferno that profs and newbies alike adore. Whether or not you've read Dante, this is an amazing take on a 700-year-old must-read! I'm reading Sayer's, the Hollanders', Pinsky's, and Musa's translations simultaneously with Bang's-- and while the others are vital literary sustenance, Bang's is dessert! And who knows? A few to several hundred years from now, it could be the translation from our time that is referred to as most reflective of this age.

This is a really neat translation! If you're looking for something exact, then this is NOT your copy. If you're looking for something entertaining (it does have modern pop culture references in it, including South Park) then this is perfect for you! It's a great translation, but know that it is not exact, if you're looking for something very scholarly. I read this in my upper level Religion as Literature class, so it is a little bit of both.

Mary Jo Bang's translation of The Inferno is nonpareil. She is a wondrous poet and imbues the classic with her unique and touching sensibility. The "modernization" is so refreshing.

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