



The History of Hell

By Alice K. Turner, Donadio & Olson

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A “lively...generously illustrated” (Washington Post Book World) survey of how, over the past four thousand years, religious leaders, artists, writers, and ordinary people in the West have visualized Hell—its location, architecture, purpose, and inhabitants. Illustrations; full-color inserts.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In an arresting journey through the netherworld, Playboy fiction editor Turner explores the landscape and dynamics of Hell as envisioned by writers, artists, theologians and thinkers from Plato and Augustine to Milton, Calvin, Byron and T. S. Eliot. Starting with the worlds of the dead of the Sumerians, Egyptians, Zoroastrians, Greeks, Romans and Jews, Turner moves on to the sketchy biblical basis for Christian Hell and its increasing importance in thinking about the afterlife. After the fact of Hell was settled, it was up to writers like Bede, Gregory the Great and most of all Dante to give the graphic descriptions of an infernal region where the wicked endure torments. Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire poured cold water on the idea of Hell, yet, as Turner shows, Hell, far from disappearing in the 20th century, has been one of its central metaphors. Scores of intriguing black-and-white plates reveal how Bosch, Giotto, William Blake, Michelangelo, Rodin and others have shaped popular images of the underworld. Author tour.

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From Library Journal

Turner, the fiction editor of Playboy magazine, takes the reader on more of a geographical than a theological tour of hell. She begins her examination of the concept of hell in ancient Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies, tracing its evolution into that held by the Christian Church. She considers the devil such a complex subject that he remains peripheral to her discussion. The study emphasizes the depiction of hell by such artists as Virgil, Dante, Michelangelo, Milton, and Blake and the bewildering assortment of hells within the history of Christianity. Turner remains alert to the humor lurking behind many depictions of hell, such as in medieval mystery plays. Her scholarship is thorough but not obtrusive. Suitable for informed lay readers.

- Richard S. Watts, *San Bernardino Cty. Lib., Cal.*

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From Booklist

Belief in a hell or some sort of afterlife has been intrinsic to the religions of the world ever since the first stories were shared aloud and incised in clay tablets. Turner's richly illustrated history surveys the myriad forms hell has taken in the West from Sumer to Rome and beyond. Hell has always been a more inspiring concept for theologians, poets, and artists than heaven, which is somehow more metaphoric and, let's be frank, dull. Hell is, by definition, brutally concrete, a place of heat and agony, a catalyst for the imagination to conjure up all manner of gruesome details. Turner traces the evolution of hell's topography and terrors from descriptions in the Egyptian Book of the Dead to classical Hades, retelling old stories of the underworld and working her way towards the visions of Christianity. Turner summarizes hell according to Virgil, Dante, Marlowe, Goethe, Milton, and Swedenborg and notes that the most fertile time for full-blown concepts of Hell was during the medieval era when wildly literal and gory scenarios thrilled and frightened the populace much like horror movies do today. An original, knowledgeable, and fluid presentation. *Donna Seaman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Noah Hansell:

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