



The Substance of Shadow: A Darkening Trope in Poetic History

John Hollander

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John Hollander, poet and scholar, was a master whose work joined luminous learning and imaginative risk. This book, based on the unpublished Clark Lectures Hollander delivered in 1999 at Cambridge University, witnesses his power to shift the horizons of our thinking, as he traces the history of shadow in British and American poetry from the Renaissance to the end of the twentieth century.

Shadow shows itself here in myriad literary identities, revealing its force as a way of seeing and a form of knowing, as material for fable and parable. Taking up a vast range of texts—from the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton to Poe, Dickinson, Eliot, and Stevens—Hollander describes how metaphors of shadow influence our ideas of dreaming, desire, doubt, and death. These shadows of poetry and prose fiction point to unknown, often fearful domains of human experience, showing us concealed shapes of truth and possibility. Crucially, Hollander explores how shadows in poetic history become things with a strange substance and life of their own: they acquire the power to console, haunt, stalk, wander, threaten, command, and destroy. Shadow speaks, even sings, revealing to us the *lost* as much as the *hidden* self.

An extraordinary blend of literary analysis and speculative thought, Hollander's account of the substance of shadow lays bare the substance of poetry itself.

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