

The Illustrations by Salvador Dalí

102 watercolors with pen, 1950-1952

to Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*

written 1302-1319 in exile

From the very start and for five decades thereafter, Dalí's illustrations to the Divine Comedy have been presented in highly misleading arrangements. The painter did not document those verses of Dante's great poem which evidently had motivated him; his public either ignored them completely or recognized only few of them. As this book attempts to demonstrate, each of the illustrations corresponds to a specific passage in the *Commedia*, something the artist surely intended them to do!

The book is designed to serve as an exhibition catalog. Its text comments on both the Divine Comedy and Dalí's illustrations. In recent exhibitions, most of the objects presented are in fact book prints of reduced scale (.6), edited by LES HEURES CLAIRES, Paris 1959-1963 (see references [EJ] and [ES]). The original 17 by 12 inch watercolors were sold individually after the printing and cannot be retrieved completely.

The comments regarding the *Commedia* consist of summaries from an Italian manuscript – the *Codex Altonensis* [CA] kept in Hamburg-Altona (Germany) – indicating most concisely the contents of the poem's one hundred songs (Italian: *canti*) grouped into three canticles: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*. Each Italian summary is followed by its English translation and appropriate remarks. These refer above all to the deep psychological significance of Dante's work which has been one reason for its importance over the centuries [MA]. Some of Dalí's images correspond to a particular text by Dante that needed mentioning.

The comments on Dalí's illustrations begin with a caption proposed for each image. This is followed by a citation translated from Dante's original Italian into English and expressing a conspicuous detail of the image. A footnote permits the reader to locate the citation in Dante's text. In many cases the context of the cited passage further identifies Dalí's subject. Such details as well as the psychological meaning which some images held for Dalí himself are discussed where relevant.

Apparently, only a few of the captions were chosen by Dalí himself. As for the rest, he let it happen that, misleadingly, one image was assigned to each canto. Since he did not choose one motif from every canto, the majority of images became associated with the wrong texts and were consequently misinterpreted – much to Dalí's discredit!

The pages and images of this book are arranged according to the locations of the corresponding text. In fact, the number of images illustrating a particular canto varies from zero to three. Only seventy *canti* were actually illustrated. Seventy-one pages in this book display them, as *Purgatorio* 31 required two pages. *Canti* without illustrations are briefly commented on the same pages in order to save space.

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