

1. DANTE AND FLORENCE

This painting of Ivo David could also be entitled *In the Middle of the Road* or, simply *The Dark Forest*. It is one of the most powerful depictions of Dante that has ever been seen. In the background are infernal trees, hidden by a gigantic tree having roots in the shape of lion's claws. "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, / che la diritta via era smarrita. / Ah quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura / esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte, / che nel pensier rinnova la paura". (Midway along the journey of our life / I awoke to find myself in a dark wood, / for I had wandered off from the straight path. / How hard it is to tell what it was like, / this wood of wilderness, savage and stubborn / (the thought of it brings back all my old fears). **Inferno I, 1-6** (Mark Musa). If we re-read the entire **Canto I** of the **Inferno**, we realize that the dream of Dante is an allegorical and symbolical value: in fact, the forest, symbol of sin and fault, represents truth and virtue towards which men should arise; but are impeded by three wild beasts symbolizing three grave vices: female leopard, incontinence; lion, violence; she-wolf, fraudulence. This is already all the structure of **Sacred Poem** in miniature.

In the pictorial representation of Ivo David, all the symbolical and allegorical elements are present in their Fusionistic essentiality in the center of the picture where there is a grotto with trees of splendid and powerful colors. This surrealistic painting is presented to the spectator in a form that commands fear especially by the big roots with nails, the bewildered look of Dante and the powerful colors. In the fearful shadow of the forest, a large eye in the center of the picture invites spurring thoughts to the poet lost in the world of vices. To the left of the picture stands the cupola of Brunelleschi and to the right the bell-tower of Giotto. Under the cupola are the medieval style porticos where Florentine jesters and Provençal troubadours are recorded: they are none other than Petrarch and Boccaccio. Santa Maria del Fiore of Brunelleschi contrasts in a particular way, with the black shadow (political) at the base of the bell-tower of Giotto.

With this illustration of Dante, Ivo David enters in the era of his great artistic maturity and enters into the style of aristocratic painting. His futuristic painting is truly a dream seen through Dante's vision. The Poet's inspiring thoughts for his Florence amalgamates with those of David who is preoccupied with the lack of humanity and justice in the contemporary world. Such thoughts are in the representation of the city of Florence with buildings that had been constructed two centuries after Dante. They stand as testimony of the splendor of the city that had been the cradle of Renaissance civilization and, at the same time, the origin of so much evil that had afflicted the Poet and humanity. This is how Dante was dismayed by not only thinking of his personal unhappiness but also that of Florence filled with political and moral problems. The dark forest is also depicted in the shadow that descends from the bell-tower (with the sun in the back illuminating and projecting the gloominess-symbol of all the bad that exists in humanity). Fusionism is also explained through the amalgamation of the trees in the Florentine landscape and countryside, the red tiles

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David's depiction of the door of the Inferno is a most revealing painting, original and of deep artistic maturity. The colors are superb and the images are as moving as the waves of a sea during a tempest. In the middle of the painting is a large monstrous face representing a cavern. On the top, are hills dominated by an immense sun. On the left corner, is the Statue of Liberty who is there to indicate the loss of every free will after the sin and after the entrance to the Inferno. On the right, are nude figures one of which seems to be defecating to symbolize vice, the low life, impudence and lasciviousness. All these elements and these images reveal once again the great inventive and fantastic ability of our painter who clearly shows his artistic maturity. The moral of this painting consists of showing how with those who should guide man toward virtue (the Pope and the cardinals) are wavering toward lust in the papal court and the unrestrained sexuality. The words "Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate" (Leave every hope you who enter) is affixed upon the eye of the Infernal door. The sun rising from behind the mountains is the symbol of the divine illumination that never abandons our "Fugitive Ghibellin".

4. THE INFERNAL HELMSMAN

We are still in **Canto III** of the **Inferno**: looking at the misery of the sinnerful, Dante sees other souls gather around the banks of the river Acheron. Charon takes them across on his small boat. The demon Charon, the helmsman, old, white with ancient hair and with eyes of live charcoal, imposes Dante to stay away from the dead; but Virgil tells him that it is the divine will. Thus the demon calms down a little and motioning to the souls that are cursing God and their parents, makes them tally in the boat and beats them with the oar. The boat gone, an earthquake occurs, whereupon Dante falls asleep and in his dream traverses the Acheron. In the pictorial representation of Ivo David, the sinners are nude in the small boat and are shown with dark and turbulent colors. The regurgitating of the water is executed in an original and fantastic manner. The souls are afraid of Charon not only because of his live charcoal eyes but also because he beats them with the oar on the leg that is in the back to make them proceed: in this way he is reassured that the back leg goes forward. To the left of the painting is a bridge that leads to the city of evil. At the bottom of the picture is Dante himself fainted on the ground.

5. CHARON AND CELESTINO V

This is the second picture that Ivo David has executed on the subject. Charon who is a character of Dante that lends itself easily to Fusionism. The helmsman at the prow of the infernal vessel transports the souls to the Inferno. The sinners are nude, confused and wild (also because of the vortex movement of the water: "Caron dimonio, con occhi di braccia / loro accennando, tutte le raccoglie; / batte col remo qualunque si adagia. / Come d'autunno si levano le foglie / L'una appresso de l'altra, fù che 'l ramo / vede alla terra tutte le sue spoglie, / similmente il mal seme d'Adamo / gittansi di quel lito ad una ad una, / per cenni come augel per suo richiamo. / Costor sen vanno su per l'onchia bruna, / e avanti che sien discese, / anche di qua su per la senda s'avana". (The devil, Charon, with eyes of glowing coals / summons them all together with a signal; / and

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for all emerges either from the modern judicial life which is then confounding. The intellect of David doesn't believe at all that justice in the world has a universal validity, the validity that he augurs. Here is the pictorial criticism of the lack of social justice.

7. PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

Dressed in medieval clothes, Paolo and Francesca are kissing each other: they are seen swept away from the infernal storm that never ceases. Francesca from Polenta, daughter of Guido il Vecchio from Ravenna, was married to Gianciotto Malatesta, rude and defamed man. Dante asks Francesca how her love had begun for her brother-in-law Paolo. This courteous and pained soul told him that one day the two had been reading for fun a book of Lancelot of the Lake. They were alone so that reading often urged them to look at each other reciprocally. Their faces blushed "ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse" (but only one point was what won them.) "Quando leggemmo il desiato riso / esser baciato da cotanto amante. / questi, che mai da me non fu diviso, / la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante." (It was when we read about those longed-for lips / now being kissed by such a famous lover; / that this one / who shall never leave my side) / kissed my mouth, and trembled as he did". (Mark Musa, **Inferno V, 133-136**).

And thus continued the love story: "Si cade la terra dove nata fui / su la marina dove / Po discende / per aver pace co' seguaci sui. / Amor, ch' al cor gentil ratto s'apprende, / prese costui de la bella persona / che mi fu tolta; E 'l modo ancor m'offende. / Amor, ch' a nullo amato amar perdona, / mi prese di costui piacer sì forte, / a che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona. / Amor condusse noi ad una morte. / Caina attende chi a vita ci spense". ("The place where I was born lies on the shore / where the river Po with its attendant streams / descends to seek its final resting place. / Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart, / seized this one for the beauty of my body, / torn from me. (How it happened still offends me!). / Love, that excuses no one loved from loving, / seized me so strongly with delight in him / that, as you see, he never leaves my side. / Love led us straight to sudden death together. / Caina awaits the one who quenched our lives".) **Mark Musa, (Inferno, V, 97-107)**

When Francesca narrated to Dante the origin of her love for Paolo Malatesta, the Poet was crying. The narration was so moving that Dante fainted on the ground. In this picture of Ivo David, just as that of the evocation of Dante, the two condemned in the second circle of the lustful are Paolo and Francesca, "in-laws, who fell desperately in love, but, surprised and discovered, were slain by Gianciotto Malatesta, brother and husband of the two lovers, respectively." In answer, to the invitation of the Poet, "passion bursts into flames and the tragic epilogue is narrated by Francesca among nostalgic sighs that changes into cries of pain" (Corrado Gizzi).

David revives with live participation the adventure of Francesca and Paolo. The two souls are wrapped in the infernal turbulence, in a vortex that transports them continually like a windmill with powerful winds. The interpretation of David approaches the vision of William Blake. The three colors of the Italian flag (white, red and green) are present in the scene

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dinali, / in cui usa avarizia il suo coperchio" ("The ones who have the bald spot on their heads / were priests and popes and cardinals, in whom / avarice is most likely to prevail"). (Mark Musa, **Inferno, VII, 46-48**) And further: "Or puoi veder, figliuol, la corta buffa / dei ben che son commessi a la Fortuna, / per che l'umana gente si rabbuffa: / che tutto l'oro ch'è sotto la Luna / e che già fu di quest'anime storte, / non potrebbe farne posar una" (You see, my son, the short-lived mockery / of all the wealth that is in Fortune's keep, / over which the human race is bickering: / for all the gold that is or ever was / beneath the moon won't buy a moment's rest / for even one among these weary souls"). (Mark Musa, **Inferno, VII, 61-66**).

Ivo David has read many critical comments before putting himself to work on the painting of the misers and the prodigals. In reality, the retaliation doesn't seem clear at first whether for the misers that do not often have their money or for the prodigals who did not know how to measure their spending. The sin that truly dwells in the soul of the moralist and of the painter, is the avarice intended not only as retaliation of prodigality (that is as stingy), but in the broadest sense of the word, that is, as avidity of worldly goods (cfr. Manfredi Porena, **Inferno**, Zanichelli Editore, Bologna, 1957, p. 78).

10. THE CITY OF DITE

Inferno VIII, 67-81. A small boat manned by the demon Flegias, navigates the two poets across the Styx. The depiction of Ivo David is a small boat approaching a big city that has reddish towers and is protected by many demons. The doors of the city are slammed close in the face of Virgil. But the rod of the angel succeeds in opening it by the will of God and the Virgin Mary who has interceded for the salvation of Dante.

On top right is shown the wedding of the Virgin (union on the earth); a temple is drawn by an empty swan; on top right are public buildings. It is the representation of the ephemeral trip of a boat that brings to a world where the opportunities are closed. Only the angel succeeds in opening the doors for Dante.

11. FARINATA

The two poets go across the door of the city of Dite and among the burned tombs they meet Farinata of the Uberti (chief of the Ghibellin party) who saves Florence from destruction, but died in 1264, that is, a year before the birth of Dante. With him is Cavalcante Cavalcanti. The heresiarch of the sixth circle lying dead in the burning arches and Farinata, among them, appears from the waist up. "O Tosco, che per la città del joco / vivo ten vai così parlando onesto, / piacciati di restare in questo loco. / La tua loquela ti fa manifesto / di quella nobil patria natio / a la qual forse fui troppo molesto" ... ("Oh Tuscan, walking through our flaming city, / alive, and speaking with such elegance, / be kind enough to stop here for a while. / Your mode of speech identifies you clearly / as one whose birthplace is that noble city / with which in my time, perhaps, I was too harsh"). (Mark Musa, **Inferno X, 22-27**).

Dante is recognized by the Florentine and apostrophized by Farinata of the Uberti. He presents himself to them, and during a passionate colloquy on discussions of Florentine politics, Farinata predicts to him in a covert manner, the next

of the city roofs, the narrow streets, and the immense shadow overspread upon them almost suffocating them.

2. BEATRICE AND VIRGIL

From Paradise, Beatrice descends into the Inferno and visits the limbo and meets with Virgil. Dante is still in the dark forest. Beatrice has a splendid robe in the shape of a butterfly and a long mantle like that of a Madonna (somewhat angelic): "io era tra color che son sospesi, / e doana mi chiamò beata e bella, / tal che di comandare io la richiesi. / Son Beatrice che ti faccio andare; / si vegno del loco ove tornar disio; / amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare" (I was among those dead who are suspended, / when a lady summoned me. She was so blessed / and beautiful, I implored her to command me. / ... I am Beatrice, who urges you to go; / I come from the place I am longing to return to; / love moved me, as it moves me now to speak) (Mark Musa, **Inferno II, 52-54, 70-72**).

To the left of the picture, the American modern world is shown through a window with venetian blinds that closes the view over the Inferno and shows the preoccupied face of Dante. Under the facial image of Dante, the American flag with stars and stripes in red, white and blue is displayed. On the right side of the depiction, in the obscurity, is a gigantic infernal tree, under which is Sordello. The latter appears as a troubadour (Provençal troubadour), whose body is covered by an empty and flexible guitar, lacking in substance (à la Dalí). On the top half of the picture is a red sun with a white center that dominates the whole scene and illuminates the splendid image of Beatrice. David demonstrates clearly here the Fusionistic maturity of his painting that has reached the summit of surrealistic expression. Virgil who appears to Dante when he is about to fall definitively is the symbol of human reason who predicts to the Florentine Poet the coming of such a one that will regenerate the world (the famous Veltro Danteasco, upon which are many critical hypothesis and many literary opinions).

3. PER ME SI VA (THROUGH ME ONE GOES)

We are in **Canto III** of the **Inferno**. After Dante and the Maestro enter into the sour and sylvester road, they find themselves at the door of the Inferno, the anguished city where there is eternal suffering. The words written on the frontispiece of this door are of dark color ("Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate") (Leave every hope you who enter) and again gave perplexity to the soul of Dante who exclaims: "Maestro, il senso lor m'è duro!" (Maestro, their direction is hard for me!) Virgil pursues him, then, with a happy countenance, he takes him by the hand and conducts him into the: "Per me si va ne la città dolente, / per me si va ne l'eterno dolore, / per me si va tra la perduta gente. / Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore; / fecemi la divina potestate, / la somma sapienza e il primo amore. / Innozi a me non fur cose create / se non eterne, e io eterno duro. / Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate" (I am the way into the doleful city; / I am the way into eternal grief. / I am the way to a forsaken race. / Justice it was that moved my great Creator; / divine omnipotence created me, / and highest wisdom joined with primal love. / Before me nothing but eternal things were made, and I shall last eternally. / Abandon every hope, all you who enter.) (Mark Musa, **Inferno III, 1-9**).

with an oar he strikes the laggard sinner. / As in autumn when the leaves begin to fall / one after the other (until the branch / is witness to the spoils spread on the ground), / so did the evil seed of Adam's Fall / drop from that shore to the boat, one at a time, / at the signal, like the falcon to its lure. / Away they go across the darkened waters, / and before they reach the other side to land, / a new throng starts collecting on this side". **Mark Musa, (Inferno, III, 109-120)**.

The painting of David is most original: the resigning Pope's face cannot be seen, whereas the pontifical throne is drawn in black. In the right inferior corner is a large senatorial room with empty seats to symbolize the renouncement to power, to sloth and to anarchy. Always on the right on the upper part, is seen part of the Basilica of Saint Peter's covered with a skull. In reality, it is a farmer who is looking at himself in the mirror and sees a head without flesh: such a skull represents the contemplative life as hermit to which the resigning pope would have been dedicated to after having abandoned the throne. The colors are of bright shining red.

The background with the Basilica of Saint Peter's renders the picture in a classical-Renaissance style to contrast it a little to today's world that is represented on the right. The multiple tiaras have ten faces that symbolize the conclave of cardinals gathered for electing a new pope, who, in this case, will be Bonifacio VIII, the greatest enemy of Dante. The throne is not a throne ary more, because he had abandoned it. The colors are those warm colors of the **Inferno**. It is not a neo-realistic picture but a true surrealistic vision of David, thus as he sees Dante's **Celestino V**.

The moral meaning of today contained in this picture consists of the *great refusal* to the establishment that is also met in the famous book by Herbert Marcuse: **Man in his Dimension**. Celestino V has also been immortalized by many writers, poets and artists of every kind, for his humility, his poverty and the renouncing to power (thus as if he disrobed of the papal garments and went away from Rome). The cover over the empty skull represents the Capitol of the USA: the emptiness of the bodies has been already represented by the great Salvador Dalí. For further information on Celestino V, cfr. **Adventure of a Poor Christian** by Ignazio Silone.

6. MINOS

We are in **Canto V** (vv. 1-12) of the **Inferno**. **Minos** is the infernal judge of the second Circle of the lustful, overwhelmed by the storm through the darkness... Ivo David shows him with a long twisted tail grasping the damned and hurls them down in the assigned circle. Minos appears as a much more sensual monster and shows his genitals that are commensurate to the body. On the top part of the right side of the picture is an ox that is mated with Pasifae, most sensual mythological woman, then giving birth to the notorious Minotaur who becomes enclosed in a labyrinth. The **Fusionism** of David is successfully employed here whether for the serpent's tail of Minos, the **One Way Street** and the words "La legge non è uguale per tutti" (The law is not equal for all). On the top left part there is a blue sun.

In this painting, **Minos** is holding his own tail and he twists it as many times as the sinner must descend down to the different circles. There are small flames around that symbolize the infernal fire. The anarchic motive of the law that is not equal

and symbolize either the love of the country, of the painter or his sensual love. The large apple that emerges from the red of the picture, on the upper part, indicates clearly either the **Big Apple** (the metropolis of New York) or the disobedience of Adam and Eve in earthly paradise. The souls are immersed in the red, dominated by the figures of Paolo and Francesca who are kissing. Dante is the link that binds the two souls to the loving sensibility of the painter.

To the right of the painting, is a street lamp with a prostitute standing beside it, for in the love ideology of Ivo David (and also of Dante), excessive love can lead to adultery and prostitution. A powerful sun illuminates the infinity of the human actions and of our living condition which is dangerous, transient, provisory, contingent. There is a blue sun is symbolic of the divine illumination.

The metropolis, seen on the left of the picture, could be New York or any large city where there is lust and corruption. The large buildings extend to reach the sky and to challenge the omnipotence of God (as it happened in the construction of the Tower of Babel). Furthermore, the buildings are illuminated by the sun that should be guide to humanity toward virtue. Here is where the painter fuses the past with the present, Dante's episodes with the contemporary world. In fact, on the left side of the picture is figured the police which is the public force that seeks to maintain order in the city. The image of Dante dominates the right side of the painting in a surrealistic way.

8. CERBERUS

The three-headed dog stands as guard of the third Circle of the greedy. Cerberus's hands are garnished with claws, he barks, scratches and skins the damned. Dante and Virgil keep him happy with three loaves of bread (it seems to me). The hailstones and rain punish the damned whose mouths are in mud. (**Inferno VI, 1-18**). Cerberus has the hide of Ivo David, with three long 1-15 necks alla Modigliani and the three heads that bark at Dante and Virgil.

9. MISERS AND PRODIGALS

Pluto is the guardian of the fourth Infernal Circle: the misers and prodigals who are in continuous movement turning weights from right to left. (**Inferno VII, 1-12**). The king of the underground is renowned for his abduction of Proserpina in a meadow of flowers: the daughter of Demeter (Ceres) becomes his wife and queen of Averno. The misers and prodigals suffer in this circle rolling enormous weights, in two groups that butt violently with each other. Virgil, with regard to riches wrongly used by these sinners, instructs Dante on the true angelic nature of Fortune, proposed by God for the distribution of worldly riches.

Ivo David represents Pluto on top of the painting with Neptune's trident. A Rolls Royce symbolizes the modern rich who dissipate while the poor serve them drinks. For Dante, the rich are also the priests, the bishops, the cardinals and the popes, he includes all the clerics in the world. The scene is very animated: to the left is modern life, whereas to the right, the dragons persecute the sinners that push heavy sacks filled with money. From the left Dante and Virgil look down: "Questi cerchi, che non han coperchio / piloso al capo, e papi, e car-

exile. Soon interrupts Cavalcante of Cavalcanti's colloquy, and asks Dante for news of his son Guido. Ivo David's illustration is presented in his fiery colors of vivid red to show Farinata, from the waist up among the tombs in flame.

12. THE CENTAURS

These have the head of man and body of a horse and strike arrows from the arch against the damned violent ones that boil in the blood that runs in the Flegeton. The red colors dominate all the bloody scene and action is packed. Among them are Nessus and Chiron, the famous teacher of Achilles, Jason and other Greek heroes. (**Inferno XII, 58-75**).

13. THE FOREST OF SUICIDE

In the seventh circle is an unnatural wood or supernatural, with dried and distorted plants, with poisoned thorns, with the filthy Arpie who fly here and there. Among the ones who committed suicide (Pier delle Vigne), are also the squanderers that are torn to pieces by dogs. (**Inferno XIII, 1-39**. Cfr. also **Inferno XIII, 1-15, 31-78**).

Pier delle Vigne is shown nude inside of a tree, with a round and overhanging belly. To the right Skin-Heads represent the unrestrainable modern life that is going toward self-destruction. Also, a person is lying on the ground injecting a drug. All of David's paintings have an unusual majesty: in the middle of it is represented the American flag because the United States is considered one of the richest nations of the world and sometimes sin in prodigality toward other poorer nations. To the right of the picture is Dante represented in a surrealistic manner with six very expressive eyes.

At the right base of the picture are represented the Skin-Heads in a person lying that is shooting the syringe of drugs. From here the ethic and moral value of the picture leads Ivo David to the same level of Dante's moralism—brought forward to modern times.

14. THE GREAT OLD MAN OF CRETE

A great statue represents the Great Old Man, situated between the cave of Mount Ida with the back turned to the Orient and the face toward Rome. (**Inferno XIV, 97-120**). Dante derives the origin of the infernal rivers from the tears of the 1264 of the Old Man.

15. THE SEDUCTORS

These are struck by the whip of horned devils. Here Ulysses is the main character: he tried to reach the mountain of Purgatory. Neptune, king of the ocean, became jealous because Ulysses had violated the human limits and his realm, never yet traversed. (**Inferno XXVI, 16-48**).

David's figuration is powerful and expressive. The two flames are contained in the middle the head of Dante who speaks with Ulysses. The two flames are red and have surrealistic eyes. The signs (posters) STOP CRIME indicate to respect the limits of humanity. The columns of Hercules, situated between Morocco and Gibraltar, indicated the limits imposed to men by the divinity: he who ventures into the ocean would have disobeyed Jupiter and profaned the temple of Neptune, God of the sea and oceans. To the right is a motorcycle that represents the Skin-