Ruthven Todd: “Blake’s Dante Plates,” Gilchrist’s Life, article collection

The Newsletter sends Season's Greetings to all its readers, in the hope that we will soon see the fulfillment of the opening lines of "A Prophecy" in Blake's Europe:

The deep of winter came;
What time the secret child,
Descended thro' the orient gates of the eternal day:
War ceased, & all the troops like shadows fled to their abodes.

NEWS

Mr. Ruthven Todd's essay, "Blake's Dante Plates" has been reprinted, with additions, from BOOK COLLECTING & LIBRARY MONTHLY (147 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1). Copies are available from the publisher at 75¢ each.

As readers of the Newsletter know, Mr. Todd has been working on a revised edition of Gilchrist's Life. We have sent him xeroxes of a number of Blake articles in connection with this, and he proposes to eventually give these, with whatever others are sent to him, to the Preston-Blake Library in Westminster. The articles are to be mounted in large folio loose-leaf volumes--over a dozen volumes have been made up already--with an index volume for the set. The advantages of such a collection to Blake scholars working in London are self-evident, and we would like to encourage authors of articles to send xeroxes.
One of the articles missed in our last checklist is "Blake and the Grotesque" by Dennis Douglas, which appeared in Balcony, VI (Summer 1967), 9-16. We thank Michael Tolley for sending us a copy (Balcony is published in Australia). And G. E. Bentley, Jr. writes: "The reference in the June 1967 BRL to E. J. Rose, "The Circle of the Life of Man," Connoisseur CLXI (January 1966) is a ghost; on this page is merely a photograph of the Arlington Court picture; it is not connected with an article at all; and Rose has no article in the journal."

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He said himself that he was speaking to future generations, and the fact is that William Blake is finally being exposed beyond the—to now—somewhat small circle of friendly Angels to a wider literary public, many of whom have considered him some kind of excrescence upon the otherwise smoothly cultivated land of English literary history. One of the most pleasant events in this progress of exposure occurred at the meeting of The English Institute, September 3rd through September 5th, at Columbia University (where, coincidentally, Orc is currently being reborn and bound).

Under the careful guiding hand of David Erdman, three papers and a prize essay were read, each dealing with some aspect of the dramatic vision in Blake's work. Martha England read a superb piece, speculating upon Blake's debt, in "An Island in the Moon," to Samuel Foote's dramatic improvisations in the Haymarket. Her analogies between Blake's methods of characterization, his settings, his jokes, his songs in "An Island" and the things Foote was doing in his satirical stage pieces were rather convincing. Irene Taylor presented a meticulous analysis of Blake's illustrations to Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat," an analysis which attempted to demonstrate how Blake interpreted in visual terms Gray's satirical allegory. The prize essay, by Robert Simmons, was concerned with The Book of Urizen. It was an ingenious attempt to show an incredibly formal symmetry in the structure of the book, in which all the elements, arrangement of stanzas, arrangement and style of illustrations, produce an intricate and literally graphable structure of vision. This was a valuable exercise, important perhaps to those who still think that Blake was some kind of disorderly thinker of half-baked ideas. But the dangers of such a subjectively formal analysis may outweigh the advantages: the prospect of abstracting the Prophecies into geometric forms is not a happy one, even though one might agree that in a book about Urizen, Blake might well have wanted to parody the very things Urizen is doing. Mr. Simmons recognized some of the parodic elements in the work, though he stressed too strongly his notion that in this book Blake is a "visionary of the comic."

The best event of the proceedings was David Erdman's slide lecture on America. Despite an intractable projector, he managed to demonstrate the fullness, scope, detail, and power of Blake's vision and execution. If there were any unbelievers left in the audience, Mr. Erdman had to have convinced them of