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Ruthven Todd: "Blake's Dante Plates," Gilchrist's Life, article collection

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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 ceas'd, & 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

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(or two offprints, for mounting) to Mr. Todd. His address is Ca'n Bielo/
Galilea/ Mallorca/ Spain.

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 *BNL* 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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Blake in the Institute

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 Hay-
market. 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 meticu-
lous 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 con-
cerned with *The Book of Urizen*. It was an ingenious attempt to show an in-
credibly formal symmetry in the structure of the book, in which all the elements,
arrangement of stanzas, arrangement and style of illustrations, produce an in-
tricate and literally graphable structure of vision. This was a valuable exer-
cise, 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 full-
ness, 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