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Q U E R Y

Blake's Copy of Dante

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works. In every chapter we get to know the whole Blake a little better through his rigorous explanation of the historical details. *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* makes good reading in combination with E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. In the two books the 1790's come alive in a remarkable way and Blake is seen in the midst of it all laboring by the light of his fiery forge.

Anagogical critics are still going to shake their collective heads at Rintrah as Pitt and similar identifications, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to quarrel with Erdman about any detail because he allows for other levels of interpretation while pressing his own. He, in fact, invites those other levels, perhaps more so in the revised edition than in the 1953 edition. What can one say about Erdman's book but "Read it!" It stands with Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* as one of the two great books on Blake.

QUERIES

1. W. H. STEVENSON: UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

"Death's Door"

I was in Coverdale--a long way away from Blake country, I admit--a couple of weeks ago, and I stopped to look at an old mine entrance. After I had stopped, its resemblance to Blake's "Death's Door," especially as it appears in *America* plate 12, struck me. That is, the entrance consisted of a stone doorway (though without an actual door), roofed over with a large slab. What brought the similarity to my mind was that a sizeable tree was growing above the slab, its roots twining round the entrance (which went into a sloping hillside). Is it possible that, besides the other associations of this image, Blake, having seen such mine entrances in his own area, thought of them as "entrances to death" in yet another connotation? I have not been able to check whether anyone else has thought of this, or whether Kent and Surrey yield similar doorways in fact; but someone closer to this area than I am at present may find the idea interesting.

2. RUTHVEN TODD: C'AN BIELÓ, GALILEA, MALLORCA, SPAIN

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"An anonymous visitor," presumed to be William Carey, wrote an adulatory obituary of Blake in the *Literary Gazette*, 18 August 1827, in which he mentions that he saw Blake working from his copy of "Sessi Velutello's Dante." Being more optimistic than anyone of my age has any right to be, I began to wonder what had happened to this copy. Unless it had been destroyed by fire or by "enemy action," it seemed unlikely to me that a 16th-century folio should have vanished from the face of the earth between 1827 and the present day. Probably, it seemed to me, either Mrs. Blake or Frederick Tat-ham, during a lean period, turned it into cash.

Then it struck me that, working with the folio, it was more than likely that, besides inscribing his name upon the fly-leaf, Blake had annotated the volume. The obvious place to start asking was, of course, the British Museum.

Miss Michèle Roberts, of the Bibliographical Service, after much hard work wrote to me that: "The British Museum possesses seven copies of *Dante, con l'Espositioni di Christoforo Landino et d'Alessandro Vellutello*, two of the editions published in 1544, and one each of the editions published in 1551, 1564, 1571, 1578 and 1579 respectively. A copy with associations, such as the one you are looking for, would normally be indicated by a note in the Catalogue entry; although I checked each copy no trace of ownership or annotation by Blake was discernible in any of them." Miss Roberts further mentioned that the Bodleian Library possesses at least the 1544 edition.

Although I have had no success so far, I have a feeling that some Dante scholar, somewhere, is nursing a copy of one of these editions and, being interested in the book only for his own purposes, may well be cursing the man who scribbled over the pages notes which, to him, appear arrant nonsense. As I live rather remotely on a Spanish island, I have written to my friend Professor Charles Singleton, of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, and have asked him, as a Dante expert, to spread word of my search in a world to which I myself have no other entry, and, to extend the search even farther, I would ask all Blakeians who come across any copy of any edition to check it carefully.

In the course of different research, Miss Eunice Williams, of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, told me that the Conservation Department had been examining the versos of the Dante drawings there. In addition to sketches, there are some most mysterious notes, such as, I pick at random, "N 18 next at p. 55." Since then, I have also received, from Dr. Ursula Hoff, transcriptions of the versos of all the Dante drawings in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, which have the same cryptic annotations.

Of course, any investigation of these mysteries is quite outside my capabilities, but I started wondering whether, considering the elaborate commentary contained in the Vellutello editions, these notes might not be connected with one or another of them. By great good fortune, according to a letter from Mrs. E. I. Wicks, also of the Melbourne gallery, Mr. Nicholas Draffin, Assistant Curator, Prints and Drawings, is at present studying for twelve months at the British Museum.

All I have been able to do so far is to try to pass on my suggestion about the notes being, in some way, related to one or another of the Vellutello editions to Mr. Draffin, and all I can do is to wish him success in cracking what, to me here on a mountainside, appears a code which would defy a computer or the best minds in the Pentagon.