

Introduction



The recovery and re-reading of Dante in the time of the late Enlightenment and early Romanticism was one of the major cultural events of that period. It was not restricted to poetry or to letters: it covered the whole of the fields of the arts, surpassing it and even extending itself as far as political and ideological discussions. What was at stake at that crucial moment was not only a series of interpretations of the *Commedia*, but the very meaning of the interaction between poetry and different forms of life. To that extent, the reception of Dante at that particular historical juncture involved a tremendous release of creative energies that are still being charted, understood and measured today.

William Blake's encounter with Dante, at the end of his prolific career as a poet and as an artist, did not restrict itself to a direct pictorial adaptation, even less to a particular personal interpretation. All through his evolution as an artist, Blake had understood all forms of art as dynamic and interactive, never as static or as simply allegorical. His visual reworking of the *Commedia*, therefore, could not have been predicted by Neo-classical aesthetics, nor encapsulated by early Romantic perceptions of art. The fact that the specialized bibliography on that encounter should be more abundant now –at the beginning of the twenty first century– than at any previous moment, bears witness to its continued relevance.

The present issue of *Dante e l'Arte* certainly offers itself as a contribution to that bibliography; above all, however, it speaks for the variety of critical approaches that continue to revitalise and to interrogate Blake's approach to Dante. The Dantian social network around the older Blake, the prophetic potential of his pictures, the probable sources and models of his inspiration, the implicit humour in his version of the *Inferno*, the various transformations of the character of Lucifer: all of these aspects are explored from different perspectives in the present issue of our journal. And all of them are offered here in the hope that –as Blake would have wanted– they will open and stimulate debate in all of its forms, rather than reducing or limiting it.

