

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

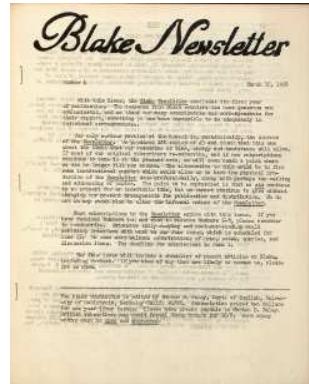
BLAKE

N E W S

Further Damoniana

Alvin Rosenfeld, S. Foster Damon

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 1, Issue 4, March 15, 1968, pp. 2-3



Further Damoniana

ALVIN ROSENFIELD kindly sends us the following report on the S. Foster Damon Festival, held at Brown University on February 22 and 23 in celebration of Professor Damon's seventy-fifth birthday: The Festival opened on Thursday afternoon, February 22, with S. Foster Damon offering a reading from his own poetry; there followed a presentation of a scene from his prize-winning play, "Witch of Dogtown"; and a piano recital of some of S. Foster Damon's musical compositions, including the song "The Garden of Love," after Blake.

On Friday, February 23, the festival continued with a Blake seminar and film. An audience of some 350 people gathered to hear Professors Damon, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and Robert Langbaum discuss "Blake in the Twentieth Century." The discussion centered chiefly on the critical discovery of Blake in our time and emphasized Professor Damon's pioneering work in the field. Professor Bloom pointed out the absence of any received tradition of commentary on Blake before Damon and paid tribute to the latter's landmark study, William Blake, His Philosophy and Symbols (1924), a work that he called, "almost outrageously magnificent."

Professor Damon spoke of how he came to discover Blake and related some of the problems he encountered in trying to read and understand Blake's poetry before a proper text was established and without the benefit of reliable scholarship and criticism.

Geoffrey Hartman and Robert Langbaum each spoke about contemporary problems in reading Blake, and both stressed the need for a critical approach that would emphasize the fundamentally human aspects of Blake's poetry as they are relevant today.

Following the seminar there was a showing of the B.B.C. television film on Blake, "Tyger, Tyger." Most people who watched the film didn't like it, and from the comments heard--"puerile, silly, long-winded, a bore"--it cannot be highly recommended. Most agreed that the earlier British film on Blake (1957) was far superior.

The festival concluded with a large dinner on Friday evening, which included brief speeches by Virgil Thomson, the composer, and Willard Maas, the poet and film-maker, among others. "A Birthday Garland for S. Foster Damon," a commemorative booklet of reminiscences and tributes collected for the occasion, was distributed to invited guests.

An exhibit of Damoniana with special Blake items, currently featured at the Rockefeller Library at Brown University, provided a fitting backdrop to the S. Foster Damon Festival. Included in the exhibit and of particular interest to Blake scholars are the following: J.G. Stedman's two-volume Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition (1796), including eight plates engraved by Blake (and possibly colored by Blake himself); the 1805 reissue of Hayley's Ballads, with five plates re-engraved (the copy on exhibit, from

Professor Damon's personal library, is the only known copy of this book in which Blake colored his own plates); and The Trianon Press facsimile volumes of Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1959), Jerusalem (1963), America (1963), Songs of Innocence and Experience (1967), and Milton (1967).

* * * * *

The "Birthday Garland," edited by Mr. Rosenfeld and Barton Levi St. Armand, is a beautiful booklet of poems, prose, and illustrations. Among the contributors are Edwin Honig, Lincoln Kirstein, Marianne Moore, Winfield Townley Scott, Hyatt Howe Waggoner, and Colin Wilson.

FOSTER DAMON himself writes to say that his Blake Dictionary has been re-issued in what is in effect a second edition, with a number of alterations and some new short articles.

Malcolm Cowley's article, "The Self-Obliterated Author: S. Foster Damon," appears in the January '68 Southern Review.

Miscellaneous News

Mr. Arnold Fawcett, publisher to the William Blake Trust, was in San Francisco recently and kindly showed us proof pages for two forthcoming Trianon Press publications. One is The Gates of Paradise, in two volumes: For Children and For the Sexes, each including some examples of different states of individual plates. The other is the next color facsimile to be issued for the Blake Trust -- Europe. Two copies of the original (belonging to Mrs. Landon Thorne and to Lord Cunliffe) were used, in order to produce the best facsimile possible. The result is, we think, an exceptionally beautiful piece of facsimile reproduction. Both The Gates and Europe will have commentaries by Sir Geoffrey Keynes; the former is scheduled for fall publication, price to be about twenty dollars; the latter will appear in late '68 or early '69, price: about 45 guineas. The address of the Trianon Press is 125 avenue du Maine, Paris.

Mr. Robert P. Kolker sends the following sad note from London:

A number of months ago the following item appeared in the papers: "A London house in which the poet and artist William Blake lived for about 17 years in the early 19th century will not become a betting shop. The South Westminster Division's betting licensing committee, sitting at Caxton Hall, decided yesterday that it was not suitable for licensed betting premises. It rejected an application by Mr. Andrew Gordon, of South Molton Street, Mayfair, for a betting licence for part of the Blake House, No. 17, South Molton Street.... Mr. David Fairbairn, who appeared for 25 objectors to the application, said one of the questions to be considered was whether the only surviving house in which Blake had lived should become a betting shop." But, alas, Satan won out and on both BBC radio and television news it was announced that the original decision