The Dead Ardours Revisited

David Bindman

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 14, Issue 4, Spring 1981, p. 211
DISCUSSION
WITH INTELLECTUAL SPEARS & LONG WINGED ARROWS OF THOUGHT
THE DEAD ARDOURS REVISITED
David Bindman

Before "The Dead Ardours Perry" enters the canon of Blake's writings [see David V. Erdman, *Leonora, Laodamia, and the Dead Ardours," *Blake* 54, Fall 1980, pp. 96-98] and becomes part of the intellectual heritage of the English-speaking peoples it might be of interest for me to describe what I can make of the words on the drawing with it in front of me. To begin with, the letters 'W B' on the left are below the level of the disputed text, therefore David Erdman's assumption that they belong with it is doubtful: more to the point, perhaps, is that the letters 'W B' do not look as if they are in Blake's hand, and they are not in the same type of script as the other text. There can be no doubt about the initial words 'The dead' nor, I believe, that they are in Blake's own formal script, but it is still not even clear how many words follow. I agree with Erdman that 'bad-doers' does not work but I would dispute it because there appear to be four letters where he reads the 'ard' of 'ardours'; in fact I see a faint 'b' or another letter with a long vertical stroke before his conjectured 'ard'. That final 'd' is certain, the 'ar' at least possible, in which case we are left with 'bard', which makes sense but can only be regarded as a tentative suggestion. The four letters read by Erdman as 'ours' may complete the word as he suggests (in which case it would be unlikely to begin with 'bard'); there could be a hyphen between them and the previous word (as in 'bad-doers'), or they could form a separate word. What makes it especially difficult is that they seem to have been gone over and altered in pencil, most likely by Blake himself. As for the word read by Erdman as 'Perry' it looks very much to me and to others who have looked at it as if it begins with an elaborate 'l' and it could end with a 'g' and not a 'y'. I can make nothing of the letters in between. I should also say that it seems very improbable that Blake would have brought in the name of such an obscure engraver in this way, in the same formal script as the title, even if there were other evidence to connect it with the *Leonora* engravings.

I am sorry to have thrown the question open again, but anyone who wants to have another try is always welcome to look at the drawing in London. David V. Erdman's response will appear in the summer 1981 issue. Ede.