

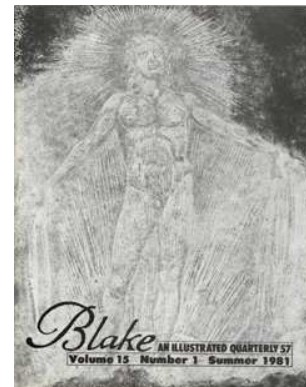
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BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

Let the Dead Ardours Live!

David V. Erdman

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DISCUSSION

WITH INTELLECTUAL SPEARS & LONG WINGED ARROWS OF THOUGHT

LET THE DEAD ARDOURS LIVE!

David V. Erdman

Perhaps it is well to have further discussion of the inscription on Blake's sketch: see David Bindman, "The Dead Ardours Revisited," *Blake* 56, Spring 1981, p. 211, querying my "Leonora, Laodamia, and the Dead Ardours," *Blake* 54, Fall 1980, pp. 96-98. Bindman and I have both examined the original sketch, in his collection, while the photograph of it as reproduced in *Blake* 54 has given people a wretchedly faint image to examine. Here, with better reproductive results be it hoped, is a re-photographing on high-contrast paper, giving much sharper definition.

"There can be no doubt about the initial words 'The dead'," Bindman agrees, adding: "nor, I believe, that they are in Blake's own formal script, but it is still not even clear how many words follow." He also questions whether Blake was the one who put his initials in the far left and whether "Perry" can possibly be the word crowded in at the end of the inscription--though he apparently takes it to be in Blake's hand: to Bindman 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 find it hard to conceive of anything that would more powerfully connect this design with the design which Blake made and Perry etched for *Leonora* (see plate 380 in Bindman's *Complete Graphic Works of Blake*) than the striking resemblances between the "dead" somethings in this sketch and the "Forms" "of Death" (according to line 2 of its inscription) in that plate that was etched and published. To Blake, Perry need not have been "an obscure engraver" even though he was a bad one and we may suppose that Blake disliked, not his obscurity, but his ugly transformation of Blake's faces and bodies with his stippling deconstruction.

That the word I have read as "Perry" might rather be a word integral to the caption, as Bindman implies, seems to be ruled out by the nature of the caption as a mock-up or layout, something I alluded to before but have now given closer attention to, thanks to the questioning. Lettering, in a design plan, is not inscribed but positioned. Bindman makes no note of the letters "V O L U M E" which have been partly cut off but are visible in the upper left portion of the sketch. It will be left to a lettering engraver to inscribe that half-title. And even the caption itself, far from being all in "Blake's own formal script," is approximately formal only in the opening "The" and the second and third "d". The smaller letters are only roughly indicated, to lay out the spacing, if later revised a bit for legibility. In short, this is not a finished inscription but a mock-up for an engraver to follow in his own style. In the three stipple engravings actually used in *Leonora* it seems evident that the identifying phrases "Blake inv:" and "Perry sc:" in the corners of the plates were not inscribed by Blake: quite possibly they were not inscribed by Perry either but by a specializing lettering engraver.



Thanks to David Bindman's query, I can now see that the "P" of "Perry" is rather more like the "P" as engraved in the published plates than it is like Blake's--though, *pace* Bindman's other viewers of the original sketch, nothing like a formal "L" can be seen here. The letter is a formal "P" in the style of copperplate hand employed by Blake (see "O Prince" for a flourished example, in *FZ* 38:15) as well as in that of the lettering engraver.

Why should "Perry" be crowded up so against the last word of the caption, and too close for a properly flourishing "P"? And why "W.B." put off toward the left edge? I take it that although the caption itself had to be carefully spaced and its style indicated, the placing of the names would depend on the final shaping of the plate. They were simply jotted here, by Perry or by some foreman, as reminders. If the design were used as a vignette under "SECOND VOLUME" (to guess at a number) it might float as a cloud above blank space and the names be tucked inconspicuously under the corners of the cloud: compare Bindman, plates 381 and 382.

As for the caption itself, however, infrared photography yields no trace of any letter where Bindman hesitantly conjectures (and abandons) a "b" for "bard." But "ardours" stands out even more clearly than "dead"; the pencil mending Bindman mentions I take to be Blake's turning the sketch into setting-copy, so to speak. If the New Mexico printer doesn't now betray us, I think no one need worry further about this transcription. David Bindman, however, has generously invited the curious to consult the original.

And what next? Perhaps someone working in publishing history will discover what aborted Volume these ardours were intended to adorn.

W B. The dead ardours Perry
David Bindman Collection.

NEWSLETTER

SONGS COPY h

BLAKE AT MLA IN 1981

A session on "Blake and Criticism," organized by Thomas A. Vogler (Univ. of California, Santa Cruz), has been approved for the 1981 annual meeting of the MLA in New York. The theme of the session will be "Blake as a self-conscious critic and theorist of language and literature, one who anticipated the principal issues in the current theoretical debate, and addressed them in ways that deserve exploration at this time." Brief papers will be presented by Nelson Hilton (Univ. of Georgia), Morris Eaves (Univ. of New Mexico), and Paul Mann (Univ. of Texas at Dallas), and the papers will be followed by a response from W. J. T. Mitchell (Univ. of Chicago). The time and place for this session will be announced later this year.

QUERY

Mary Lynn Johnson is writing the Blake chapter for the fourth edition of *The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism*, edited by Frank Jordan, Jr., to be published in 1983 by the Modern Language Association. She would like to hear from readers of *Blake* who have suggestions as to content or emphasis--particularly in regard to neglected (or overrated) critical works on Blake. Write to M. L. Grant, 15 South Seventh Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240.

Another copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* has re-emerged on the auction market after a disappearance of over sixty years. At an unknown time, the great bibliophile H. Buxton Forman acquired at least ninety-eight posthumous impressions of the *Songs*. These he had mounted on linen stubs and bound in three volumes in dark maroon levant morocco, Jansen style, with elaborately gilt dentelles. Each is stamped on the tail of the front paste-down endpaper "BOUND BY RIVIERE & SON FOR H. BUXTON FORMAN" and each bears Forman's bookplate on the inside front cover. One volume, designated as g¹ in *Blake Books* and containing 23 plates, is now at Princeton; another (g²), with 18 plates, is in the Rosenwald Collection of the Library of Congress. The third and largest volume (h), containing 57 plates on 57 leaves, disappeared after its sale to the bookdealer A. S. W. Rosenbach at the Buxton Forman auction at Anderson Galleries in New York on 15 March 1920, lot 53 (\$90). This volume, not previously described in any detail, has now come to light at Christie's New York auction of 22 May 1981, lot 36, with "A Divine Image" and "The Sick Rose" reproduced in the catalogue. It is now in my collection.

The 57 plates in copy h are in the sequence given below and show fragments (cut by the edges of the sheets) of J WHATMAN 1831 and 1832 watermarks as indicated. Unless otherwise noted, the ink is gray, ranging from very light to almost black. Plates: 1, 1 (a light red-brown terra cotta ink, hereafter designated simply as "brown"; watermark J WH/18), 3 (ATMAN/31), 2 (J WH/18), 4, 6 (ATMAN/31), 7, 8, 5, 25, 9, 10 (J WH/18), 22, 23, 16, 17, 24 (brown; J WHA/18), 19 (brown), 11 (ATMAN/31), 12 (ATMAN/31), 18 (brown), 20, 21, 26 (brown), 27, 13 14, 28 (brown, with a few spots of gray), 29, 30 (brown), 31 (brown), 38, 40 (brown; J WH/18), 42, 34, 35 (J WH/18), 36 (brown,