

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

N O T E

An Unpublished Blake Pencil Drawing of the
Lambeth Period

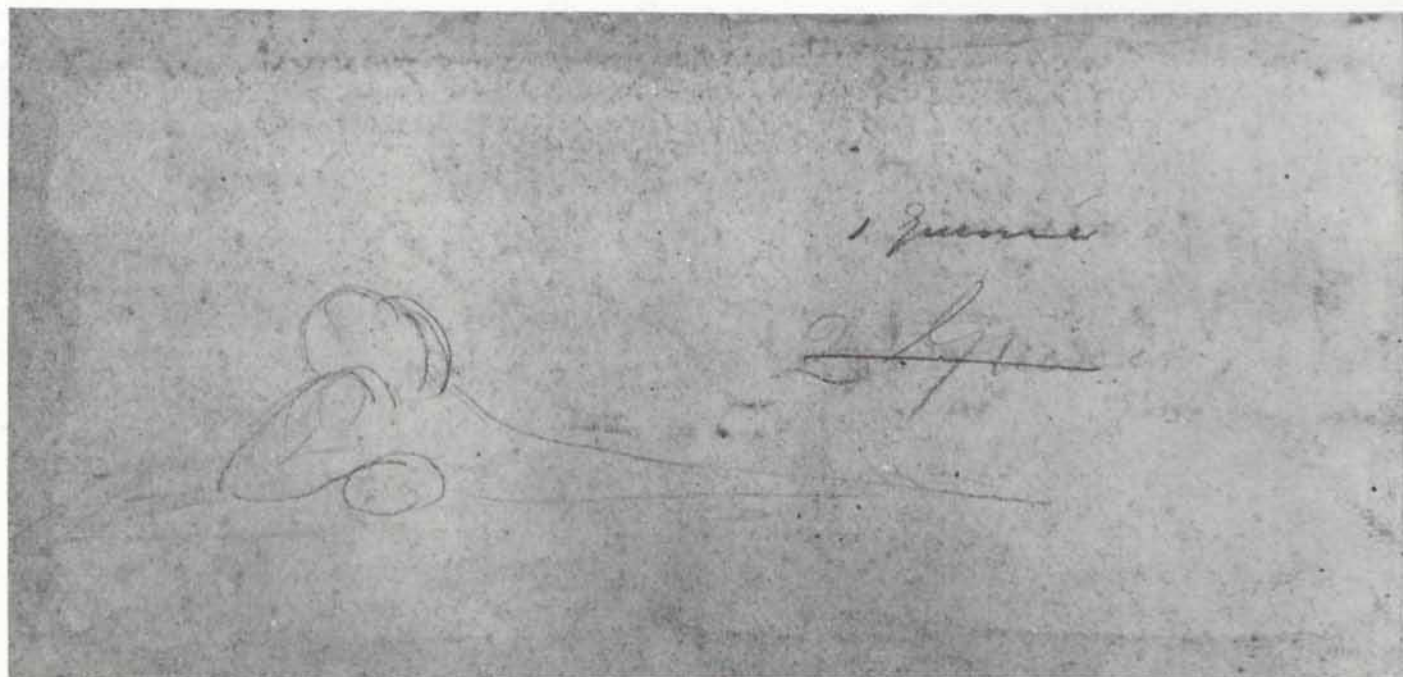
David Bindman

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 4, Issue 2, Fall 1970, pp. 38-40





1 Drawing known as "The Dead Bad-Doers," recto. In the collection of David Bindman.



2 "The Dead Bad-Doers," verso.

NOTES

1. DAVID BINDMAN: WESTFIELD COLLEGE, LONDON

An Unpublished Blake Pencil Drawing of the Lambeth Period

A previously unpublished drawing by Blake appeared in a sale at Sotheby's in London earlier this year and was bought by the present writer. The drawing was described as "The Dead Bad-Doers" and had been sold with the William Bell Scott collection under the same title in 1892.¹ It had more recently been in the collections of Lord Nathan, inserted in an extra-illustrated volume, and of Mr. F. L. Wilder.

The *recto* [1] shows a group of three figures floating on a cloud in various stages of wakefulness, and there is a rather faint inscription of probably four words in what is certainly Blake's own formal script underneath the bearded figure. This was read by Bell Scott or the compiler of his sale catalogue as "The Dead Bad-Doers," but in fact only the first two words "The Dead" can be read clearly, and the words following could not be "Bad-Doers." They are now indecipherable despite prolonged attempts at reading them with ultra-violet light. A pencilled inscription "W. B." to the left of the inscription does not seem to be in Blake's hand. The *verso* [2] contains a faint sketch which Mr. Martin Butlin has identified as a study in reverse for the titlepage of *The Song of Los*, of Urizen reclining with his hand on a skull.

The drawing on the *recto* does not correspond to any known composition by Blake, but it does have a general similarity in atmosphere and style to some of the plates in *The Book of Urizen*, notably plate 17. The drawing is quite highly finished in parts, especially in the face of the Urizen-like bearded figure, which tends to suggest the first rather than the second half of the 1790's. A date of about 1793-95 would seem to be about right on stylistic grounds. The inscription "The Dead" is an obvious clue to the subject, and the crouching position of the bearded figure as well as the struggles of the lower figure to disengage himself from a burial-shroud suggest that the drawing depicts the dead awakening from their slumber. In *The Book of Urizen*: "The dead heard the voice of the child / And began to awake from sleep / All things heard the voice of the child / And began to awake to life."² This passage occurs on plate 20, which has an illustration of the child Orc, and I can only suggest tentatively that the present drawing may have been intended initially to illustrate the passage but was rejected in the final version. This can only be a speculation, but the drawing does seem to point towards *The Book of Urizen*, and certainly towards a Prophetic Book rather than an independent composition.

There is no record of where William Bell Scott acquired the drawing, and his collection seems to have been gathered from various sources.³ There is, however, some circumstantial evidence of its previous history. It would seem to correspond to drawing no. 116 in W. M. Rossetti's list in the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life*, which is described as "A Dying Man crouching, with floating figures."⁴ It is mentioned as being in the possession of "Mr. Evans," who is presumably the dealer to whom Tatham sold a number of Blake drawings,⁵ and who also sold some Blake items to the British Museum in the 1850's. "Mr. Evans" also owned the next drawing in the list, no. 117, "An Angel taking a huge stride in the air," which must be the drawing now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Many of the uncoloured works that follow the above two drawings in the list are described as belonging to "Mr. Harvey," i.e., the dealer Harvey of Cockspur Street. A number of these drawings as well as the "Angel taking a huge stride" are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which purchased them in a bundle of twelve miscellaneous drawings from the dealer Parsons in 1881.⁶ Most of the

Victoria and Albert Museum drawings have, like the present example, a price scrawled on the *verso*, and in some cases crossed out and reduced. The present drawing has the price of two guineas reduced to one, and furthermore the word "guinea" is incorrectly spelt "guinie" as on some of the Victoria and Albert drawings. It is probable then that the prices were put on by Harvey, who must have sold the residue of his Blake drawings to Parsons, and they seem to have been priced according to the degree of finish. In the meantime he had sold a number of them previously to collectors, including a pencil drawing of "A Squatted Devil" (Rossetti, no. 123) to Bell Scott.⁷ To sum up, the probable early provenance of the drawing is as follows: Mrs. Blake, Frederick Tatham, Evans by 1863, Harvey before 1880, William Bell Scott. Most of Blake's miscellaneous drawings came through Tatham as Mrs. Blake's executor so the provenance is hardly surprising, but if the scrawled prices on the back of many of Blake's drawings can be established as that of the dealer Harvey then they could provide a link between existing drawings and the often cryptic descriptions in Rossetti's list.

NOTES

¹W. B. Scott sale (14 July 1892), Sotheby's, lot 135, bt. Ellis (£1.13.0).

²*The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1957), p. 233.

³See W. B. Scott, *William Blake: Etchings from his Works* (London, 1878).

⁴Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"* (London and Cambridge, 1863), II, 250.

⁵See Tatham's letter to W. M. Rossetti of 6 November 1862 (W. M. Rossetti, *Rossetti Papers* [London, 1903], p. 16).

⁶For example, Rossetti, nos. 121, 122, 143. The twelve drawings were bought from E. Parsons in 1881 for £7.14.0 (accession nos. 8761-65).

⁷K. Preston, ed., *The Blake Collection of W. Graham Robertson* (London, 1952), p. 239, no. 126, lot 138 in the Bell Scott sale of 14 July 1892.

2. MICHAEL PHILLIPS: UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Blake's Corrections in *POETICAL SKETCHES*

My primary purpose here is to provide a complete list of all corrections which Blake made in copies of *Poetical Sketches*. What is offered are the results of a systematic inspection and collation of the original emended copies of the poems. These findings anticipate a more comprehensive study which will provide detailed descriptions of the individual corrections that are present in each of the eight emended copies with photographs of the corrections in their varying states to complement my discussion. Remarks on the author's changing attitude toward specific corrections and also an attempt to fix approximate dates to the various copies as to when they were corrected and presented will also be given, together with a discussion which will present new material regarding the printing of the poems. Before listing Blake's corrections and their frequency of occurrence it will be of interest if a few introductory remarks are