

BLAKE'S POETICAL SKETCHES (1783)

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The *Poetical Sketches* was Blake's first book of poems and the only one printed in the conventional way. The cost was met jointly by John Flaxman and the Reverend Mr Anthony Stephen Matthews, although the expenses cannot have been very great if, as Sir Geoffrey Keynes thinks, only fifty or so copies were printed. The advertisement speaks of Blake as having been 'deprived of the leisure requisite to such a reversal of these sheets, as might have rendered them less unfit to meet the public eye', and confesses the 'irregularities and defects to be found in almost every page'. These prefatory remarks by his two friends were a little tactless, but Blake did do his best to remove some of the blemishes while the sheets were still in his possession, for apparently the book was not published in the ordinary way, but distributed privately by the author, either in sheets or simply stapled.

Of the 22 copies of the *Poetical Sketches* known to be extant, 7 contain inked corrections affecting 11 substantive readings. They may be listed as follows:

- 1. and in [uncorr: in] his hand
- 2. while [uncorr: whilst] the sun rests
- 3. her pale cheek [uncorr: cheeks]
- 4. behold [uncorr: I am] thy husband's head
- 5. love: I hear his [uncorr: her] tongue
- 6. my girls unfold [uncorr: unfold]
- 7. the rustling birds [uncorr: beds]
- 8. none other [uncorr: others] curse
- 9. of lengthen'd fares [uncorr: cares]
- 10. Reason, in his [uncorr: her] frail bark
- 11. I leave him [uncorr: them] all forlorn

As the accompanying facsimiles show, six of these readings (numbers 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9) may also be found in the Turnbull copy and