



William Blake, *Adam and Eve Asleep*. Pen and watercolor over pencil, 19⁷/₈ x 15¹⁵/₁₆ in. (50.4 x 40.5 cm.). Private collection, UK.

Blake's Unfinished Series of
Illustrations to *Paradise Lost* for John
Linnell: An Addition

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1 THE unexpected appearance of a large watercolor of *Adam and Eve Asleep*, similar in size, technique, and finish to the three known watercolors from the series done for John Linnell in 1822, is a surprise. So, perhaps, is the fact that it is a surprise. The fact that all three of the known *Paradise Lost* watercolors are fully completed works, unlike the series of illustrations to Dante and to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, both left incomplete at Blake's death, may well have put off speculation about what would seem to have been intended as a complete set of near copies of the twelve subjects of the series done for Thomas Butts.

2 Blake's first series of illustrations to *Paradise Lost*, twelve in number, was painted for the Reverend Joseph Thomas in 1807.¹ The series was repeated at twice the size for Butts, the most important patron of Blake's earlier years; most of these watercolors are dated 1808 and one subject, *Satan Spying on Adam and Eve and Raphael's Descent into Paradise*, was replaced by the subject of the newly discovered watercolor, *Adam and Eve Asleep*.² Nearly fifteen years later, on 9 May 1822, Linnell, who succeeded Butts as Blake's

1. Butlin, *Paintings and Drawings* 1: 378-81, nos. 529 1-12. Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California.

2. Butlin, *Paintings and Drawings* 1: 383-88, nos. 536 1-12. The series is divided: nos. 3-9 and 11-12 are in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 1 is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. 2 is in the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California, and no. 10 is in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. For the possible execution of this series over a number of years and the possibility, no more, that Blake topped and tailed the twelve subjects with watercolors of the same size depicting *The Fall of Man* and *A Vision of the Last Judgment*

chief patron in his later years, recorded that "M^r Blake began copies from his Drawings from Miltons P.L. [*Paradise Lost*]"³

3 Unlike Butts's series, which was much larger in size and differed in many details of composition from that done for Thomas, the works completed for Linnell were basically similar to the Butts set, at least in the outlines. This had already been the case with the Job watercolors done for Linnell after the Butts series, before the addition of two subjects and their further development in the set of engravings. The only difference was the precise wording of Linnell's description of the way the repetition was made. Instead of "copies" Linnell recorded, under Saturday, 8 September 1821, "Traced outlines from M^r Blakes Designs from Job all day." On the following Monday, 10 September, he "traced outlines from M^r Blakes drawings of Job—all day / M^r Blake finishing the outlines—all day. / . . . M^r Blake took home the drawings of Job—"⁴ If Linnell was precise in his wording, he had begun by tracing Blake's outlines even though Blake had concluded by "finishing the outlines"; all this within three days.

4 Three examples of the Linnell series were known until the appearance of *Adam and Eve Asleep*, having been included in the catalogue by William Rossetti, brother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, at the end of the first life of Blake, Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*, "*Pictor Ignotus*," published in 1863 and again, revised, in 1880. These, as Linnell's note implies, follow the compositions of Butts's watercolors and are the same size. They show *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, *The Creation of Eve*, and *Michael Foretells the Crucifixion*; the first two are now in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and the last is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.⁵ The newly discovered watercolor matches these three in size, in being executed in pen and watercolor over pencil outlines, in the somewhat looser finish that distinguishes Blake's late works, and in brighter and more varied coloring as compared with the Butts prototypes. The two works in Melbourne follow their prototypes closely though not exactly (Blake has added stars on Satan's legs), but *Michael Foretells the Crucifixion* is completely transformed by the addition of rays of light emerging from the body of Christ. *Adam and Eve Asleep* resembles the two works in Melbourne, particularly *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, in closely following its prototype without elaboration, but

(Butlin, *Paintings and Drawings* 1: 466-67, nos. 641 and 639), see Butlin, "The Dating and Composition."

3. Bentley, *BR*(2) 383.

4. Bentley, *BR*(2) 379.

5. Butlin, *Paintings and Drawings* 1: 388-89, nos. 537 1-3, and Butlin and Gott 27-36, 46-52.

there are enough variations in detail to show that this is no mechanical copy; these can be found particularly in the foliage, the rounded forms of the couple's luxurious bed, and the points of the halos of the two angels. Some of the outlines of the figures and their clothing reflect the broken outlines also found in the works in Melbourne. Like the other three works, there are also a number of minor pen-timenti. As in the case of the other three watercolors, the under-drawing in pencil is presumably the product of the "copying."

- 5 Only the first of the Linnell series, *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, is signed, in Blake's typical late manner, "WBlake inv". However, all four watercolors are very slightly trimmed and seem originally to have been slightly larger than their Butts equivalents, and there are places along the lower edge of *Adam and Eve Asleep* where it is possible, with the eye of faith, to see the upper traces of some kind of inscription, perhaps another signature.
- 6 The paper of *Adam and Eve Asleep* has been identified by the paper expert and historian Peter Bower as typical of that produced by James Whatman the Younger's successor, William Balston, at Springfield Mill, Maidstone, Kent, in about 1820; this accords well with Linnell's commission of 1822. The paper is, however, wove rather than the laid of the other three watercolors but, as Bower has pointed out, Blake was not always uniform in his choice of paper for individual series of works, as, for instance, in the watercolors for *The Grave*.
- 7 A recent conservation report by Heather Norville-Day⁶ has revealed that the original paper has been relined with modern paper, "firmly bound to the original watercolour paper, suggesting it was subjected to excessive pressure when lined. ... The remnants of the skinned paper and adhesive currently attached to the verso of the watercolour paper have given the paper an additional strength and rattle different to the original watercolour paper"; this "has resulted in the sheet having a flattened, consolidated and dense texture." The work had already suffered to a certain extent from a previous treatment.
- 8 It may be that the physical state of the new *Paradise Lost* drawing reflects its rather unfortunate earlier conservation history. In particular, the overly stern expression and the mishandling of the shadow falling on the forehead of the foremost angel as compared with the Butts original could well have happened as part of a reinforcing of the pen outlines (as opposed to the pencil outlines, which were pre-

sumably the result of the "copying" noted by Linnell). Once the boggles were made they were uncorrectable.

- 9 The works from the series in Melbourne and Cambridge were all in the great Linnell sale of 15 March 1918, which included the main part of Linnell's collection, sold by his grandson Herbert. However, various other works passed to other members of Linnell's large family, and it may well be that this work, the provenance of which is at present totally unknown, could have descended by way of other members of Linnell's large progeny.⁷
- 10 The newly discovered watercolor illustrates the passage from book 4, lines 799-819, of *Paradise Lost*, in which the angels Ithuriel and Zephon are sent by the archangel Gabriel to guard the sleeping Adam and Eve against Satan, who has just entered into the Garden of Eden; there they find him,

Squat like a Toad close at the Ear of Eve;
Assaying by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancie, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Fantasms and Dreams

Ithuriel, touching the toad lightly with his spear, restores the fiend to his natural appearance. Subsequently, in book 5, lines 27-94, Eve tells Adam of her dream, as convincing as real life, in which Satan leads her to the Tree of Knowledge and tempts her to eat of the fruit thereof.

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7. For a list of possible Linnells, see Bentley, *Blake Books* p. 1043 and BR(2) 541n, 917, and, for Linnell descendants, the "Acknowledgements" in the exhibition catalogue *John Linnell: A Centennial Exhibition* viii.

6. Heather Norville-Day of Norville-Day Limited was formerly a senior conservator working on the Blakes in Tate Britain.

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