

## The “Linnell” *Adam and Eve Asleep*: The Case for the Defense

BY MARTIN BUTLIN

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1 WITH the combined condemnation of three of the most visually sensitive of Blake specialists, one is tempted to roll over and surrender. But doubts arrive, and a combination of misstatements, misunderstandings, and disputable arguments, to say nothing of actual contradictions of fact, has tempted me to return to the fray.<sup>1</sup> To begin with, there is the problem of “copying.” Comparisons with the original watercolor from the Butts collection are one thing, those with the copies done for Linnell another. In the case of the first, as reflected in the relatively faint pencil drawing under the later work in pen and watercolor, it is hardly surprising, though not accurate, to talk of the copying as being “meticulous” or “slavish.” That is the usual intention when one copies another work. Both Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi go on to demonstrate details of where Blake departs from the original, usually for the worse. It would be tedious to go through every example they quote, but one may suffice. This is the small twig bearing leaves apparently with no connection to any branch or tree, on the righthand side of the picture, more or less on the horizon. I myself find the freedom of this motif rather refreshing, and there are precedents in other Blake works, in particular the first series of illustrations to the book of Job (Butlin 550 1 and 19; see also Butlin 551 19).

1. References given in my article “Blake’s Unfinished Series of Illustrations to *Paradise Lost* for John Linnell: An Addition,” *Blake* 51.1 (summer 2017) are not repeated here. References in the form “Butlin 500” are to the catalogue numbers in Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

2 Comparisons with the three works done for Linnell are more relevant. These vary in finish from the more or less similar works in Melbourne, *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve* and *The Creation of Eve*, to the miraculous reworking of *Michael Foretells the Crucifixion* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). The new watercolor is clearly much closer to the two Melbourne watercolors than to that in the Fitzwilliam Museum, although in both Melbourne watercolors Blake has begun, but only begun, to make changes such as those to the stars and halo noted by Essick. However, the style of the new watercolor when compared to those in Melbourne is, to my eyes, very similar indeed, despite the so-called differences pointed out by Essick and Viscomi. For instance, the coloring of *The Creation of Eve* is more or less precisely that of the new watercolor; in fact, they can be said to have been painted from the same palette. The handling of the sky, worked up in a relatively atmospheric way, is the same. The difference in the quality of the pen outlines is, to my mind, highly exaggerated by the critics, and Blake is equally successful in both *Adam and Eve Asleep* and *The Creation of Eve* in suggesting the modeling and the fall of light on the foremost reclining figure. This he does by defining the lower outline of the foremost reclining figure with a stronger line than that of the contour of the further thigh, in this case conveyed by the pencil underdrawing of the “copy.” In general we hope, with detailed illustrations from both the new watercolor and from a number of contemporary works, to convince our critics. For this reason we have, perhaps rather naughtily, asked the editors to place the caption for each detail where it cannot be seen at the same time as the illustration itself.

3 Moreover, while it is correct to say that the new watercolor and its putative Melbourne companions do not reflect Blake’s contemporary style as fully as his other late works, such as the second series of illustrations to the book of Job or those to Dante, there is a good reason for this: the overall size and the forcefulness of the figures of the models in the Butts collection. Among the watercolors these last are exceptional even for their date, c. 1808, even if compared to the largest of the illustrations to the Bible or other contemporary works. (The large color prints of “1795” are of course another matter, being in a totally different, and weightier, medium.) This exceptional quality would have made the mellowing of Blake’s late style and handling almost impossible to achieve without destroying the special attributes of the originals.

4 The critics are worried by the total absence of any provenance for the new watercolor. As Bindman says, “Thanks to the list by the Rossetti brothers [*sic*] in Gilchrist’s life, a high proportion of Blake’s drawings—even small scraps—are recorded by the middle of Victoria’s reign.” However, cer-

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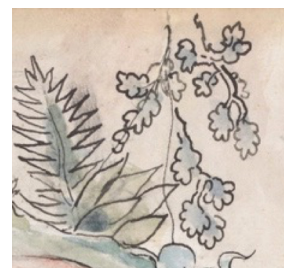
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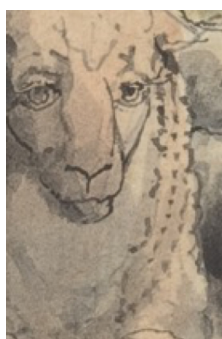
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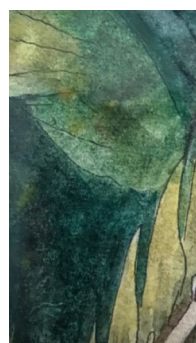
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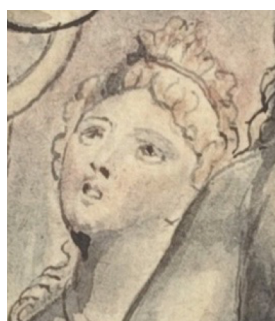
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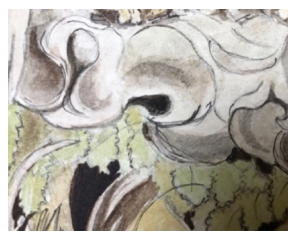
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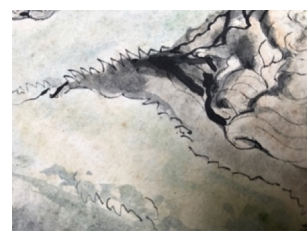
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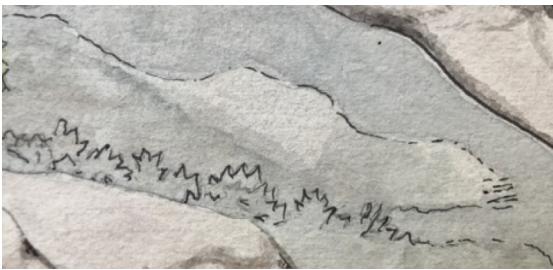
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tain highly important works did escape attention, including the main body of watercolor illustrations to *The Grave* and the Arlington Court tempera painting. William Michael Rossetti's lists depended very largely on what he had seen himself and what he was told about or learned from the sales that took place while he was preparing the lists. Viscomi has analyzed this in his detailed untangling of the whole story of the mid-nineteenth-century sales of works from the Butts collection.<sup>2</sup> The scrappy drawings from the Tatham collection were known to Rossetti; the *Grave* watercolors and the Arlington Court picture were hidden away in private collections far from London.

- 5 Similarly, single works escaped from the series for which they were originally designed. Viscomi himself, in sorting out the history of the works in the Butts collection, has shown how the Butts series of illustrations to *Paradise Lost* was first of all split in half between two members of the family.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently they were divided again, both by Rossetti in his lists and in the saleroom. In the watercolor illustrations for *The Grave*, two of what seem to have been originally intended as candidates for the planned twenty engravings have escaped from the main series: *The Widow Embracing Her Husband's Grave*,<sup>4</sup> one of the subjects included in Cromek's first prospectus of November 1805, and the companion to *The Grave Personified*.<sup>5</sup> This is to say nothing of the various finished watercolors for alternative title pages and the dedication (Butlin 613, 616, 620). Again, one of Blake's illustrations to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the watercolor of *Christian with the Shield of Faith* (Butlin 829 20), was given by Blake to Mrs. Charles Aders for her autograph album.
- 6 As in the case of the collection of Linnell, the multifarious descendants of whom accumulated a wide variety of surnames, as referred to in my article, Viscomi has provided a list of surnames of those related to Butts;<sup>6</sup> any of these could have inherited individual works from their father or grandfather. In the case of the works that descended from Frederick Tatham to his brother-in-law George Richmond, there are the complexities of the purchase by Dr. Richard Sisley

2. Joseph Viscomi, "Blake in the Marketplace 1852: Thomas Butts, Jr. and Other Unknown Nineteenth-Century Blake Collectors," *Blake* 29.2 (fall 1995): 40-68, and "A 'Green House' for Butts? New Information on Thomas Butts, His Residences, and Family," *Blake* 30.1 (summer 1996): 4-21.

3. Viscomi, "'Green House'" 20.

4. Butlin 633, updated in *William Blake's Watercolour Inventions in Illustration of The Grave by Robert Blair*, ed. Martin Butlin, essay by Morton D. Paley (Lavenham, Suffolk: William Blake Trust, 2009) 22-23, 68.

5. Butlin 778 as *A Destroying Deity* (Philadelphia Museum of Art), updated in Butlin and Paley 22, 54.

6. Viscomi, "'Green House'" 20.

(pace "Dr. Cicely" in the sale catalogue of 29 April 1897) of fifteen works.<sup>7</sup>

- 7 If Linnell and his family failed to sell any works publicly before the great sale of March 1918, it was not for want of trying. As well as helping to market the engraved illustrations of the book of Job, Linnell endeavored to dispose of the whole series of Dante illustrations and those to *Paradise Regained*—perhaps partly in the interests of the artist's widow. He also tried to dispose of a number of unspecified "Drawings."<sup>8</sup>
- 8 Presumably Viscomi's confusion between which works were "copied" or "traced" is just a simple mistake. He makes a point about Blake's use of paper in his series of watercolors, so perhaps I should quote in full Peter Bower's account of those used for the finished watercolors for *The Grave*, when Blake used no fewer than three kinds of paper. (Bower examined the works in London prior to their sale at Sotheby's New York on 2 May 2006.)

Blake was quite individual in his use of paper, not always using the same paper for a particular project and sometimes using a relatively old paper. For example the twenty watercolours for Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*, are executed on three different papers: the Title Page is on a drawing cartridge paper made by Austen Stace who ran Horn Street Mill, a two vat mill on the Seabrook stream in Cheriton, Kent, from 1781 until 1806. Five of the works are on a white wove watercolour paper, similar to that used for *Adam and Eve Asleep*, made by William Balston and the Hollingworth Brothers at Turkey Mill, Boxley, near Maidstone, Kent. The remaining 14 works are on a white wove writing paper made by Robert Edmeads and John Pine at Ivy Mill, the Loose Valley, near Maidstone, Kent.

- 9 David Bindman's objections are unique in that he alone, together with the owner, myself, and a few friends, has actually seen the work in the flesh. (Despite this, he seems to have failed to notice the underdrawing.) Bindman and I have also seen the three related works from the Linnell collection, both that in Cambridge and the two in Melbourne. Essick and Viscomi accept that they have not seen the original and Essick goes on to refer to his note on "Attribution and Reproduction" of 2011 to defend his reliance on photographs.<sup>9</sup>
- 10 Although modern reproduction techniques are getting more accurate by the minute, they are only just beginning to suggest the texture and three-dimensional quality of a

7. Butlin 1: 29, under no. 77.

8. Bentley, *BR*(2) 484-509 passim.

9. See Essick's note 2.



work of art and cannot give a proper impression of the full physicality and, above all, the scale of a work. As already mentioned, the impact of the Butts *Paradise Lost* watercolors and the “copies” made from them is striking; each time I have seen the new work I have been impressed again by the impact the watercolor makes by its sheer size (50.4 x 40.5 cm.) and the scale of the figures. The owner and I have also been able to look at it and discuss it (and again with Bindman) under all sorts of conditions of light and setting. Under artificial light and varying qualities of daylight the effect of the work is subtly changed. A change in the framing also made a difference. Essick’s “Attribution and Reproduction” article certainly makes the point that photographs can assist in discovering details of handling that are barely distinguishable by the naked eye; they are also reminders of a work already seen in the flesh. However, there is far more than this that can be ascertained from seeing the work itself, in particular the impression the work makes as a whole and at its full size. A lot of connoisseurship depends upon recognition fueled by experience and a good visual memory and, as such, is bound to be to a considerable degree intuitive and subjective, however important photography, documentary evidence, and other material questions may be in contributing to a decision.<sup>10</sup>

- 11 Interestingly, Bindman was more impressed by the new watercolor when he actually saw it than he had been from a photograph, and his reactions were more to the general effect of the picture than the detailed criticisms of Essick and

10. For a detailed, if old-fashioned, account of aids to attribution, see M. J. Friedländer, trans. T. Borenius, *On Art and Connoisseurship* (London, n.d. [c. 1941]), in particular chapters 23-25, “On the Value of the Determination of Authorship,” “On the Objective Criteria of Authorship,” and “On Intuition and the First Impression.”

Viscomi. In particular, like everybody else, he is worried by the profile of the nearer angel—stern rather than sympathetic, somewhat ill proportioned, and with a great black splodge on the forehead. Was this a mistake or a deliberate change of emphasis? He also pointed out that, unlike the Butts prototype, the further angel is looking vaguely into space rather than at his companion. However, exactly the same occurs in one of the Melbourne watercolors, *The Creation of Eve*, where Eve, rather than looking up toward the outstretched hand of the Creator as in the Butts watercolor, again looks vaguely into space. He was also worried by the brightness of the white of the paper, but this may have been the result of the earlier cleaning mentioned by both Bower and Heather Norville-Day in their reports. To sum up, I respect Bindman’s objections but beg to differ.

- 12 Perhaps the only way forward is to compare all the related works side by side in the flesh. A possible opportunity would be the rumored forthcoming exhibition to be devoted to Blake at Tate Britain, provided that the organizers would agree and that the putative lenders would be agreeable.

## Captions

1. *Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity*, c. 1805–10 (detail). Butlin 550 21. Morgan Library and Museum, New York. 2001.83.
2. *Every Man Also Gave Him a Piece of Money*, c. 1805–10 (detail). Butlin 550 19. Morgan Library and Museum, New York. 2001.81.
3. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
4. *Dante at the Moment of Entering the Fire*, c. 1824–27 (detail). Butlin 812 85. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920 (1018-3).

5. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
6. *Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity*, c. 1821 (detail). Butlin 551 21. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.9018.

7. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
8. *The Inscription over the Gate*, c. 1824–27 (detail). Butlin 812 4. © Tate, London, 2017. N03352.
9. *The Inscription over the Gate*, c. 1824–27 (detail). Butlin 812 4. © Tate, London, 2017. N03352.
10. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.

11. *Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity*, c. 1821 (detail). Butlin 551 21. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.9018.
12. *Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity*, c. 1821 (detail). Butlin 551 21. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.9018.
13. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
14. *Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity*, c. 1821 (detail). Butlin 551 21. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.9018.

15. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
16. *Michael Foretells the Crucifixion*, c. 1822 (detail). Butlin 537 3. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. PD.49-1950.
17. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
18. *Michael Foretells the Crucifixion*, c. 1822 (detail). Butlin 537 3. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. PD.49-1950.

19. *Angel of the Divine Presence Bringing Eve to Adam*, c. 1803–07 (detail). Butlin 435. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1906. 06.1322.2.
20. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
21. *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, c. 1822 (detail). Butlin 537 1. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920 (1025-3).

22. *Adam and Eve Asleep*, c. 1822 (detail). No Butlin number. Private collection, London.
23. *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, c. 1822 (detail). Butlin 537 1. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920 (1025-3).