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**BLAKE**

M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

“The Very William Blake of Living Landscape  
Painters”!

Martin Butlin

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are long, rounded, and transparent: the cutting teeth are four above and six below.<sup>2</sup>

Stedman's spectre-bat has the qualities of gluttony, ugliness, and murderous intent associated with the spectres in the prophetic poems. Blake even draws the Spectre with a dark body and enormous bat-wings that are spread over Los to occlude a vision of higher realms (J 6).

The Spectre also haunts the reposed body of Jerusalem. With his page-wide wingspread, he separates her from the dying Albion (J 33). So, an image that had seized Blake's fancy while at work on a hired job eventually became transmuted into a baleful and portentous element of his epics.

<sup>1</sup> S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> London, 1796, pp. 142-143.

MARTIN BUTLIN

### "The Very William Blake of Living Landscape Painters"!

"He is the very William Blake of living landscape painters." This quotation from the *Illustrated London News* for 10 May 1845 is particularly surprising in its context. It does not refer to Samuel Palmer or Edward Calvert, nor even to such extravagantly imaginative landscape painters as John Martin or Francis Danby, but was discovered by my wife Frances during her researches into contemporary press accounts of J.M.W. Turner. Apart from the fortuitous and, so far as I know, unparalleled linking of the names of the two artists with whom I personally have been most involved, it would seem quite extraordinary to find the unchallenged, if highly controversial, leader of painting in Britain in the 1840s described in terms of an artist so little regarded at this time as to make every mention of his name a matter for the record.

The context is, alas, disappointing insofar as any new light is thrown on the two artists. The article, a survey of Turner's career, begins promisingly enough: "Art is never more the subject of conversation in the London circles of fashionable life than it is from the first Monday in May to the close of the Royal Academy Exhibition. Have you been to the Academy yet? Have you seen Mr. Turner's landscapes, or Mr. Grant's fine portraits? or what do you think of Collins or Maclise? are the questions that are regularly put to you . . ." There follows an account of Turner's beginnings with topographical watercolors and his first Academy successes up to about 1815. "Mr. Turner is equally distinguished for the excellence of his oil pictures and his water-colour drawings. He has the art of poetizing everything . . ." But his early works "are better of their kind than any of his after productions we can name"--this was a common criticism during Turner's later years. "Mr. Turner is an artist upon peculiar principles. It is either the



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this orifice he continues to suck the blood, until he is obliged to disgorge. He then begins again, and thus continues sucking and disgorging till he is scarcely able to fly, and the sufferer has often been known to sleep from time into eternity. . . . Having applied tobaccosashes as the best remedy, and washed the gore from myself and from my hammock, I observed several small heaps of congealed blood all round the place where I had lain, upon the ground: upon examining which, the surgeon judged that I had lost at least twelve or fourteen ounces during the night. . . .

Having measured this creature I found it to be between the tips of the wings thirty-two inches and a half; it is said that some are above three feet. . . . the colour was a dark brown, nearly black, but lighter under the belly. Its aspect was truly hideous upon the whole, but particularly the head, which has an erect shining membrane above the nose, terminating in a shrivelled point: the ears

fashion to admire him altogether, or to condemn him at a glance. The feverish glare of his present style - that systematic defiance of every kind of principle in art or appearance in nature--still continues to find admirers; and a book has been written of late, and it is a clever one, wherein every excellence in landscape art is found pre-eminent in Mr. Turner" - this was volume I of *Modern Painters* by "A Graduate of Oxford," the young John Ruskin, published in 1843. Then follows the reference to Blake and a concluding sentence excepting certain of Turner's recent paintings from those condemned for their "exaggeration."

The chief interest would seem to be that Blake, as a visual artist, was even in the 1840s assumed to be well-known to the general reader as a figure of controversy and "exaggeration," rather than being the "Pictor Ignotus" of the subtitle to the first, 1863 edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*. That the pre-Gilchrist view of Blake was a distorted one, largely based on fanciful anecdotes about the Visionary Heads, is not surprising, but that the reader of the *Illustrated London News* could be expected to take in a casual reference to Blake at all is perhaps worthy of note.

#### RAYMOND LISTER

#### Calvert's "Lady & the Rooks" & Cornish Scenes

In an article published some years ago,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Geoffrey Grigson commented on reminiscences of Cornish scenery in Edward Calvert's visionary engravings. He mentioned in general the landscape in the valley of the Fowey north of Lostwithiel, and in particular the castle and steep slope of Restormel, which he thought might be reflected in the wood-engraving, "The Lady and the Rooks." I too referred to this in my monograph on Calvert.<sup>2</sup>

I recently revisited Cornwall after an interval of twenty-two years, and took the opportunity of looking at the castle of Restormel (twelfth-thirteenth centuries) and its surroundings. It is in a splendid setting, similar to that in "The Lady and the Rooks," with the ground everywhere steeply sloping away, revealing lovely views. Yet the Romantic building in the background of Calvert's engraving has nothing in common with the stark lines of Restormel itself, and I left feeling less convinced than before about the association.

Later during the same afternoon, I visited Lanhydrock House, near Bodmin, seat of the Robartes family. It is a late nineteenth century Romantic building, replacing one of the seventeenth century, the larger part of which was destroyed by fire in 1881.

One structure unaffected by the fire was the granite gatehouse, built between 1636 and 1651, which, as I first looked at it, seemed familiar. I had by this time dismissed "The Lady and the Rooks" from my mind, but it came back now with redoubled force. If Calvert based his design on Cornish landscape and details, this gatehouse was surely what he had in mind. For, although the detailing of Calvert's building (which could be the side of a gatehouse) and that at Lanhydrock are somewhat different, they have enough in common to make the identification likely.

And not only the structure, but the wooded setting, is remarkably like that in the engraving, perhaps not sloping so dramatically, but sufficient to have provided the inspiration.

<sup>1</sup>"A Cornish Artist Edward Calvert, 1799-1883," *The West Country Magazine* Vol. I, pp. 43-6.

<sup>2</sup>*Edward Calvert* (London: 1962), p. 86. "The Lady and the Rooks" is number 13 in the catalogue in that book (p. 105).



The Gatehouse, Lanhydrock House, Cornwall (1658). A Property of the National Trust.