“The Very William Blake of Living Landscape Painters”!

Martin Butlin

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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 tobacco-ashes 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 are long, rounded, and transparent: the cutting teeth are four above and six below.2

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.

2 London, 1796, pp. 142-143.
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,¹ Mr. Geof-
frey 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.²

I recently revisited Cornwall after an interval
of twenty-two years, and took the opportunity
of looking at the castle of Restormel (twelfth-
thirteen 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
tines 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 de-
tailing 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.

¹ "A Cornish Artist Edward Calvert, 1799-1883," The West
Rooks" is number 13 in the catalogue in that book (p. 105).