

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

Martin Butlin, *The Blake Collection of Mrs. William T. Tonner; The Pickering Manuscript*, facsimile published by the Morgan Library

Morton D. Paley

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 6, Issue 3, Winter 1972-73, pp. 78-79



Bulletin / Philadelphia Museum of Art. Vol. 67, no. 307 (July-September 1972). Pp. 34. \$1

The Pickering Manuscript / William Blake. Introduction by Charles Ryskamp. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1972. Pp. 6 + 22. \$3

Reviewed by Morton D. Paley

The entire July-September issue of the Philadelphia Museum's *Bulletin* for 1972 is devoted to an illustrated essay by Martin Butlin: *The Blake Collection of Mrs. William T. Tonner*. This publication marks an event of the first importance to those interested in Blake, the gift of eleven works from Mrs. Tonner's estate, which as Mr. Butlin says "promotes the Museum at one bound into the ranks of leading American Blake collections." All the pictures are reproduced--one (the beautiful *Nativity* painted for Butts) in color, the rest in

halftone along with six other pictures and one inscription. Mr. Butlin's commentary is both cogent and informative, so that it is not so much necessary to review this publication as to call attention to its contents.

Four other Butts pictures are included in the Tonner gift: *Christ Baptizing, Mary Magdalene Washing Christ's Feet, Samson Subdued, and Jephthah Met by his Daughter*, all watercolors. The *Samson* is informatively reproduced with its companion picture, *Samson Breaking his Bonds* from the collection of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne. There is also the watercolor *Malevolence*, which gave rise to Blake's imbroglia with Dr. Trusler and hence to one of Blake's most spirited defenses of his art. Perhaps the most important single picture in the collection is the color print *God Judging Adam*, which Butlin considers "the most dramatic copy" of the three known examples.¹¹ The four remaining designs are the sketch for *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, the Flaxmanesque *Warring Angels*, the drawing of *The Death of Ezekiel's Wife*, and *A Destroying Deity*. The last named is perhaps the most interesting of

Hoover, continued

mention, not just one, but several of the most important ones, in order to suggest Blake's preoccupation with certain images throughout his career, and to try to throw some light on the ways in which the *Job* series manifests those concerns. To mention only one such correspondence, as Wright has done, might tend to suggest to the unwary student that that instance is unique. To be sure, such visual parallels have been largely neglected by all past commentators; close attention to them would seem to be called for in any future study of the work.

Perhaps the most unaccountable omission occurs in Wright's comments on Illustration XX, "Job and his Daughters" (illus. 1). There are a number of riddles in this, one of the most important plates of the series. What are the indistinct decorations on the wall behind Job, at seat-level? More important, what are the scenes depicted in the lozenges on the wall behind Job? Immediately behind him and slightly above we can see quite clearly a depiction of the event that took place in Illustration XIII, "The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind," but opinions differ as to the subjects of the two flanking scenes. Of these differences Wright gives an astonishingly incomplete account: he mentions only Jean Hagstrum's reading of the scene to Job's left. Wright's own somewhat uncertain interpretation ("the flanking scenes seem to show the destruction of Job's children") is closest to Damon's: "To his right and left are panels depicting the disasters that befell him."

A close study of the two side lozenges does not unfold their mystery entirely, but it does

make some interpretations, especially that of Wright, less tenable. The lozenge on Job's right clearly shows a group of young people pursued, and in at least two cases struck, by two old men with stakes or pikestaffs in their hands. Over this scene of horror and alarm broods a floating figure, male, somewhat indistinct, with long hair and outstretched arms. Needless to say, this assault by old men bears no resemblance to the destruction of Job's children as depicted by Blake in Illustration III. The subject of the second lozenge is less clear. In the foreground a man holds a plow, his head thrown back violently. In the background farm buildings go up in flames, while over it all floats a figure with outstretched arms, from which seem to have been generated the lightnings that started the fires.¹¹ This figure has a pleasant face and long hair. Although it is clearly masculine, like the other it does not resemble Satan. In Hagstrum's view the obvious echo in this lozenge of Blake's moment of inspiration in *Milton* (plates 14 and 29), in which Blake is pictured with his head thrown back and the falling star about to enter his left foot, suggests the regenerate Job who has become an

¹¹ The outstretched arms occur, not twice, but four times, in this design: once in each of the lozenges just mentioned, once in the lozenge immediately behind Job in which God speaks from the whirlwind, and in the foreground figure of Job himself, who sits with his arms outstretched over his three daughters. There is a question as to whether Job is to be thought of as pointing to the two scenes on either hand; at least one hand gives that impression.

the four. Butlin dates it very late (c. 1825-26), comparing the figure's webbed wings with those in the tempera *Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils*. There is also something in the sculpture-like massiveness of the figure which recalls some of the illustrations to the *Inferno*.

Butlin's valuable pamphlet is a kind of *hors d'oeuvre* which makes us all the more anticipate the feast of his forthcoming complete catalogue of Blake's paintings, watercolors, and drawings. Conversely, *The Pickering Manuscript* is a welcome dessert, following what the *Newsletter's* reviewer called "the definitive catalogue of one of the last three great Blake collections in private hands": *The Blake Collection of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne* by G. E. Bentley, Jr.² That catalogue was published by the Morgan Library in conjunction with its exhibition of the Thorne collection; now we are informed in Charles Ryskamp's brief Introduction to *The Pickering Manuscript*, that Mrs. Thorne gave the Manuscript itself to the Morgan Library at the end of 1971, thus adding even further to the Library's magnificent Blake collection. The fact

that the entire Manuscript is here reproduced in facsimile for the first time speaks for itself. We might, however, reiterate a point made by John E. Grant in *Newsletter* 21: with the ever-growing interest in Blake, facsimiles now perform two functions--they make material widely available, and they also reduce unnecessary wear on the originals. *The Pickering Manuscript* should serve both purposes admirably.

Morton D. Paley is Executive Editor of the Newsletter.

1 Butlin points out that for the Tate copy of this work Blake received one guinea from Thomas Butts, giving the U. S. equivalent as about \$2.50. It is only fair to Butts, however, to remember that both the guinea and the dollar are not, alas, what they once were. In 1793, for example, Blake advertised *America* at 10s 6d; and in 1806, the year of the receipt for *God Judging Adam*, Blake sold John Flaxman a "singularly grand drawing of the Last Judgment" for one guinea (Bentley, *Blake Records*, p. 575).

2 Robert Essick, *Newsletter* 21, p. 26.

Hoover, continued

artist. The other scene, to Job's right, Hagstrum describes as "the day of [Job's] suffering."¹² One must agree with Hagstrum that the figure of the plowman echoes *Milton* and suggests the introduction of Blake himself into the story. But what of the burning buildings and the hovering figure? (Hagstrum doesn't say.) And one must agree that the other scene represents suffering of some kind, but whose suffering is it?

In my view the least implausible explanation that has yet been given is Wicksteed's, that "the panel on Job's right tells of the dire deeds of man against man [old men assaulting youths], that on his left of the disasters Nature inflicts [the buildings struck by lightning--perhaps the plowman, too], both inspired by Satan [the hovering figures in the two pictures]." The commentary in Binyon and Keynes follows this reading. But even this hypothesis leaves questions unanswered: why the echo from *Milton* in the figure of the plowman? If the hovering figures are Satanic, why don't they resemble Satan? Etc. Had Wright given closer attention to the details of the illustration, and included more of the earlier commentary, the reader would have a better notion of just what the difficulties are. As it is, we are presented with the patently implausible and left to shift for ourselves. (Although in several other places Wright refers to the earlier watercolor versions of the *Job* designs, he here omits mention of the interesting and suggestive fact that Blake left the lozenges indistinctly drawn in all sets of the watercolors. Only the last, "New Zealand" set has some adumbration of the scenes as we know them in the engraving, but without the engraving to guide

us we should find it difficult to tell much about them.)

In his interpretations of individual plates Wright has contributed several interesting observations to the literature on the designs. One of these is his identification of the objects lying on the ground between Elihu's feet in Illustration XII, "The Wrath of Elihu," as a purse and two pieces of money, rather than a potsherd, as Wicksteed had supposed. This seems a plausible conclusion, consistent with the larger meaning of the work.

Beyond specific criticisms, which will vary from reader to reader, this presentation of Blake's *Job* is flawed generally by its inadequate exposition of Blake's vision and method. If the account of Job's error is almost banal, the understanding of forgiveness and self-sacrifice as the energy of redemption is limited and understated. Much is lost, moreover, through an unwillingness to contemplate either symbolism or structure in the designs as a series. In sum, this book, seemingly designed for the beginning student, lacks the reflection, care, and learning that we might have hoped for in a new edition of this great work.

12 Jean H. Hagstrum, *William Blake: Poet and Prophet* (Chicago, 1964), p. 135. Hagstrum gives a more elaborate, more suggestive, but in some ways wilder, reading of the lozenges in "Blake's Blake," *Essays in History and Literature, Presented by Fellows of the Newberry Library to Stanley Pargellis*, ed. Heinz Bluhm (Chicago, 1965), p. 174.