

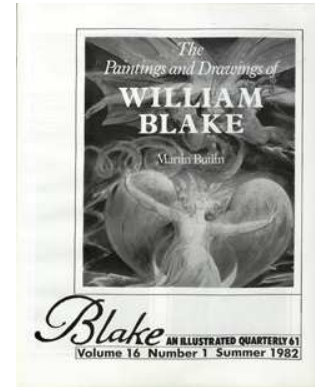
# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

A R T I C L E

## Observations on Blake's Paintings and Drawings (Based on Butlin's Catalogue Raisonné)

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# OBSERVATIONS ON BLAKE'S PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS (BASED ON BUTLIN'S CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ)

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**M**artin Butlin's two-volume plates-and-catalogue set, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981), provides what hundreds of research trips cannot offer, the opportunity to compare works by Blake in widely scattered collections, executed in different media, during different periods. Since I have been in correspondence with Butlin about some of the interpretations of Blake's pictures that his book has suggested to me and have received his acquiescence on most points, I would like to summarize my proposals for the scrutiny of the Blake community, assuming that others who are eagerly studying our new resource are also making discoveries that ought to be shared now rather than held for fuller development in specialized articles. For the sake of simplicity, I shall present my proposed identifications of subjects, notations of recurrent motifs, and observations of analogues in the order of Butlin's catalogue numbers (followed in parentheses by his plate numbers) in *Paintings and Drawings*.

cat. 86r (pl. 92) *An Old Man Appearing on a Cloud to a Young Nude Couple*. The nude couple--minus the old man in the cloud--appears on plate 5 of *All Religions Are One*;<sup>1</sup> the connection between this plate and the preliminary sketch on cat. 85v was observed in John E. Grant, "Addenda and Some Solutions to Tolley's Blake Puzzles," *Blake Studies*, 3 (1971), 135. The reclining male nude is also anticipated in three sketches on cat. 81 (also pl. 81), though his position is reversed and his legs are more nearly horizontal.

cat. 110 (pl. 113) *Lot and the Angels* (?). The two prominent vessels on the table and the exotic design of the low chairs suggest that this couple is Philemon and Baucis, elderly Phrygians who shared their meager provisions with the disguised gods Hermes and Zeus, for which they were rewarded by the perpetual replenishment of their cruse of oil (or in some versions their jug of wine). Admittedly, the female appearance of their solitary guest argues against this interpretation.

cat. 115r (pl. 125) *Moses Staying the Plague* (?). This appears to illustrate Ezekiel's prophetic act in the Valley of Dry Bones, at the moment when the bones become flesh: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ezekiel 37:10). The prophet's commanding cruciform gesture and the unblemished bodies of the men (some of whom arise out of the dry earth) fit the text in Ezekiel better than that of Numbers 16:46-50, in which Aaron is supposed to be burning incense and standing between the dead and the living (a congregation of men, women, and children--not men only as in this drawing). Butlin points out that the dimensions of *Moses Staying the Plague* (?) are close to those of the work by this name exhibited in 1876 by the Burlington Fine Arts Club; perhaps the work was mistitled even then. David Bindman's title, *The Second Vision of Ezekiel*, in *Blake as An Artist* (Oxford; Phaidon, 1977), p. 17, seems right except for number: first, the Wheels (1-2); second, the Abominations, the Man



with the Inkhorn, and again the Wheels (8-11); third, the Dry Bones (37); and finally, the Temple (40-44, 47).

cat. 147 (pl. 161) *A Young Woman Reclining on a Couch, Writing in a Book.*

cat. 148r (pl. 162) *Group of Men Seated in a Circle.* Although these pictures are not clearly related in provenance, size, and media, the subjects reappear together in some small pencil designs, enclosed in frames as if for a page layout, on cat. 212r (pl. 244) and, upside down, on cat. 212v (pl. 245) and cat. 213v (pl. 246). The woman, reclining and writing (or reading), appears underneath a group of standing men in cat. 212r and 212v; in 213v the men are seated, and the indistinct figure underneath is also seated, reading or writing. Perhaps the woman is writing a visionary interpretation of a historical event the men are planning. cat. 147 is in "Pen and grey wash over pencil," cat. 148 in a compatible "Pen and indian ink over pencil." The unevenness of the top right edge of cat. 147 indicates that this sheet has been damaged; even now, the drawings are close in size and may originally have been still closer. Their provenances are not mutually exclusive or incompatible; as there is no record of cat. 148 until 1876, it may also have been in the Tatham collection.

cat. 154v (pl. 168) *A Warrior in Armour Kneeling before a Bearded Elder.* In composition this sketch anticipates cat. 459 (pl. 540), *David Pardoning Absalom* (cat. 459, pl. 540), one of the biblical watercolors executed for Butts in the 1800-05 series. Though Butlin dates the sketch c. 1780, the interval of more than twenty years would not necessarily have deterred Blake from returning in a wholly new style, even with a different subject, to a composition he liked. The interval between the newly recognized Blake pen drawing, *Goliath Cursing David* (cat. 119Ar, pl. 133), c. 1780-85, and the watercolor version of the same subject in the biblical series for Butts (cat. 457, pl. 525), c. 1803-05, is equally long--though, as we shall see, the later Goliath reveals a remarkable development in Blake's iconography of giantism.

cat. 220 (pl. 251) *Two Figures in a Decorative Border.* The central figure may well be Psyche, lifting her lamp or torch to observe the sleeping Cupid. The horse-like "tail" area that gave rise to Butlin's speculation that she may be a female centaur is actually the bowed head, knee, and upper arm of a different, larger-scale (and probably unrelated), mourning female, in profile facing right. She resembles the chief female mourner in *The Death of Ezekiel's Wife* (cat. 166, pl. 203) and the rightmost figure in *The Mourners* (cat. 153, pl. 169). The "Psyche" composition resembles the central fan design of cat. 223Av (pl. 256).

cat. 222 (pl. 252) *"Is All Joy Forbidden."*

cat. 224 (pl. 257) *Los, Orc, and Enitharmon (?)*.

cat. 238 (pl. 276) *A Woman Standing Before Two Massive Seated Figures.* These three sketches

are similar in style, dimensions, paper stock, and theme. All imply conflicts between parents and their adolescent children. In all three a book is shown, apparently as a source for or reinforcement

of the parent's blighting authority. The tiny flying mother and child at the upper left of *"Is All Joy Forbidden,"* perhaps depicting in contrast the nurturing of joy, appear in reverse on the half-title of *The Book of Thel* (*The Illuminated Blake*, p. 35). In *Los, Orc, and Enitharmon* (?), the pose of the adolescent son, his curly hair identifying him as an Orc figure, resembles--though from a back view--that of the curly-haired woman also tied by her wrists in one of Blake's engravings for Stedman's *Narrative*, "Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave."<sup>2</sup> On the basis of this analogy, it is probable that the object in the hand of the father figure is a thonged whip rather than compasses. The third sketch recapitulates the tensions of "A Little Girl Lost" of *Songs of Experience*: the position of the Ona figure's hands suggests that she has been caught in a sexual indiscretion; the buried face of the father figure and the open book beside him are also strongly reminiscent of the father's response in "A Little Girl Lost." In all three sketches the denial or repression of the vital force in the maturing children causes the suffering of both parents and children; in all three the mother, if present at all, is only a passive witness or mourner; in all three a nude adolescent is in conflict with a gowned parent.

cat. 231v (pl. 266) *Esther Appealing to King Ahasuerus against Haman.* When in conversation with Sir Geoffrey Keynes I suggested this subject for the sketch, I could not see the lines of "Haman's" broad-brimmed hat, sharply visible in the photographic reproduction. Now, noting the resemblance in composition between this sketch and that of an earlier drawing, *The Keys of Calais* (cat. 64, pl. 56), I suspect that "Haman" is a later version of a burgher of Calais pointing to his benefactress, Queen Philippa. There may be a clue in the hair-style of the queen: three or four separate braids or curls hanging down her back, down to her waist, is perhaps more suggestive of medieval Europe than of biblical Persia.

cat. 239v (pl. 280) *Sketch for a Border.* Judging from the two flowerlike spirits at the bottom, this may be a draft for the title page of *The Book of Thel*.

cat. 251 (pl. 301) *An Incantation.* Despite the Annubis-like appearance of the head, this appears to be a prototype of *Noah and the Rainbow* (cat. 437, pl. 514). The wavy lines of the arch in the pencil sketch are perhaps related to pentimenti in the Noah watercolor which suggest cherubs' faces and wings like those in the rainbows over the deathbeds of Joseph and Mary (cats. 511-12, pls. 610-11). The curved supports for the altar in cat. 251, however, resemble those in *The Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter* (cat. 452, pl. 522), and the same general composition is used in *Job's Sacrifice* (cat. 551-18, pl. 750) and its preliminary sketch (cat. 557-41, pl. 778).

cat. 392 (pl. 499) *The Judgement of Solomon.* The symmetrical placement of angelic wings behind Solomon probably alludes to the Mercy Seat (Exodus 24:17-30; Hebrews 9:5), also underlying *Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels* (cat. 500, pl. 603), as its inscription indicates. (It was Darrell Figgis



who first observed that this picture in turn is related to the Beulah-vision of angelic guardianship of Albion in *The Four Zoas*, Night VIII.<sup>3</sup>) This positive allusion suggests that the apparent risk of human sacrifice in Solomon's pronouncement is in reality an occasion for forgiveness.

cat. 436 (pl. 513) *The Angel of the Divine Presence Clothing Adam and Eve with Coats of Skins.*

cat. 457 (pl. 525) *Goliath Cursing David.* My suggestion in a conversation with Sir Geoffrey Keynes--accepted by Butlin in his commentary on cat. 436--that the six toes of the Angel of the Divine Presence, like the six toes of Goliath, indicate membership in the Giant Brood, can be further supported. The description of Goliath's son who was slain by David's armies is slightly clearer in 1 Chronicles 20:6 than in the corresponding passage in 2 Samuel 21:20: "And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant." In isolation from this passage and from the water color picture of Goliath, the extra digit of the Angel who towers above Adam and Eve might appear to be an insignificant accident. But the Goliath of this same water color series for Butts has not only six toes on his right foot (those on the left foot are too far in the background to be counted) but also six fingers on each hand! Since these extra digits do not appear in the pen drawing, *Goliath Cursing David* (cat. 119Ar, pl. 133), I suppose that Blake came upon the biblical description of Goliath's son only as he was working on the watercolors for Butts, and that he adopted it as a distinctive feature of the race of giants, whose origin he traced to the Angel of the Divine Presence. The six-toed left foot of the Angel contrasts with the normal feet of the human-sized divine being who brings Eve to Adam in the companion picture, cat. 435r (pl. 512); this contrast suggests that the two scenes take place before and after the Fall. Only after Adam and Eve experience themselves as fallen and diminished do they experience the Divine Presence as a forbidding giant who clothes them in skins but also blocks their return to Eden.

cat. 523 (pl. 584) *The Whore of Babylon.* Does the inscription "W Blake inv & del 1809" mean that Blake intended to engrave this design? The earlier biblical water colors are not signed "inv & del."

cat. 604 (pl. 845) *The Dove Brooding over the Face of the Waters (?)*. This may be a pencil sketch for *The Creation of Light*, one of the lost water colors in the biblical series for Butts.

cat. 705 (pl. 920) *"Joseph and Mary, and the Room they were Seen in."* Despite Linnell's title and the size of the female in relation to the two male figures in the tiny sketch of the whole room,

I suspect that the enlarged figures depict Jesus (with the hand of Joseph visible on his left arm) and Mary. The face of Mary in the enlarged sketch is that of a woman; traditionally, of course, and in all of Blake's paintings and drawing of the Holy Family, Joseph is considerably older than Mary.

cat. 833 (pl. 1125) *A Seated Man Spurning a Standing Woman, perhaps for "The Pilgrim's Progress."* The pose of the seated man, in every detail, resembles that of Hagen in Fuseli's *Kriemhild, Accompanied by Two Hun Servants, Shows the Imprisoned Hagen the Ring of the Nibelungen*, reproduced as figure 13 in Butlin's catalogue of the 1978 Blake exhibition at the Tate Gallery.<sup>4</sup> Butlin dates the pencil sketch 1824-27(?), and the Fuseli picture is dated 1807; the drawing appears to be in an earlier style than the other *Pilgrim's Progress* sketches.

One further note: the inscription by Tatham on *Charon, Copy from the Antique (?)*, cat. 178r (pl. 218), states that the figure was "copied from something else not designed by him." I know of one other copy of the head, by an unknown artist of the period, which may be after the same original. This was a large finished pencil drawing which I saw in 1977 at the gallery of Rafael Valls, the London art dealer, and photographed with his permission. The head, eyes, beard, staff, and general expression are too similar to be coincidental. The appearance of a wave makes Butlin rightly suspicious of the traditional identification, since the figure appears to be wading rather than propelling a ferry. The angle of the head, the pole, and the billowing of the cape do, however, recall the *Charon of Romney's "Psyche Being Rowed across the Styx,"* reproduced as figure 121 to accompany Jean H. Hagstrum's "Romney and Blake: Gifts of Grace and Terror."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1974), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Capt. J. G. Stedman, *A Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition, Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam . . .* (London: J. Johnson & J. Edwards, 1796), I, opposite 326; rpt. Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1971, I, opposite 181.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Four Zoas*, 99:7-10, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), p. 357, and Darrell Figgis, *The Paintings of William Blake* (London: Ernest Benn, [1925]), p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Butlin, *William Blake* (London: Tate Gallery, 1978), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Hagstrum, "Romney and Blake: Gifts of Grace and Terror," in *Blake in His Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 201-12. In Blake's *Charon* the small pair of parallel lines running diagonally from an area near "Charon's" left hand to an area almost as far down as the wave could be part of the ferry's rigging; the boat itself might be obscured by the raging waves. There appear to be two knots on the object I am calling a rope; the upper knot is very faint.