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## Job's Gethsemane: tradition and imagination in William Blake's illustrations for the book of job

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### Abstract

Blake created two versions of his Illustrations of the Book of Job, and it is now agreed that about twenty years separates his first watercolour series and the final engraved set of plates. The first chapter is biographical and technical: it establishes that the Butts series of water-colours was the product of the tumultuous and creative years 1805-10, following a time when Blake experienced a strong sense of vision and Christian regeneration; whereas the engraved set was produced 1821-1826, at the end of his life. It also reviews all Blake's treatments of the Job theme. The friends-turned-accusers seem to have been a central pre-occupation. Blake's illustrations contain important elements which are not found in the Old Testament text. I have followed Bo Lindberg's principle that explanation should be sought in the artistic tradition, and in the work itself. The second chapter concentrates on the tradition available to Blake, following and supplementing Lindberg's examination of the influence of the apocryphal Testament of Job, and of the artistic tradition of seeing Job as alter Christus and as Christian. Chapters three to five, interpreting Blake's imaginative use of this material, are new both in focussing on the Butts set, and in exploring the importance to Blake of St. Teresa, Fenelon, Mme. Guyon, Hervey and other people of prayer. Also discussed are Joseph Hallett's radical biblical commentary, of which Blake owned a copy, variant proofs discovered by Robert Essick of the first and last engraved plates, and the thirteenth century Job wall-paintings discovered in 1800 in St. Stephen's Chapel, Westminster. Blake's Job was unique in the corpus of his work. Previous studies have followed Wicksteed in concentrating on the engraved set, and no one has explored the implications of the earlier dating now agreed for the watercolour series. The thesis is essentially concerned with Blake's Christocentric theme, and Job's inner journey of prayer, in these illustrations. Conclusions drawn differ substantially from Wicksteed's.

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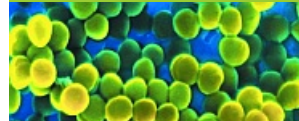
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