

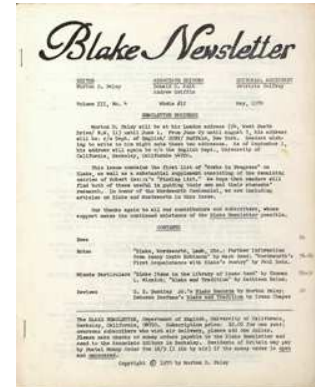
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BLAKE

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

Blake and Tradition

Kathleen Raine

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¹² The only evidence for this proposed collection is Mary Lamb's comment, in a letter written to Mrs. Clarkson on December 25, 1806, that "my brother sometimes threatens to pass his holidays in town hunting over old plays at the Museum to extract passages for a work (a collection of poetry) Mr. Wordsworth intends to publish." The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb, II, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1935), p. 33.

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

1. BLAKE ITEMS IN THE LIBRARY OF ISAAC REED

A glance through Bibliotheca Reediana (London, 1807), the sale catalogue of the library of Isaac Reed, reveals that gentleman as a bookbuyer with interests far outside his own profession of theater history. He was in fact a kind of bookstall omnivore. It is therefore not surprising that, as a friend of William Hayley and George Romney, Reed left two works by William Blake among the possessions to be auctioned after his death.

In their Blake Bibliography, Professors Bentley and Nurmi list one of these, but inaccurately (see item 431). "Blake's Poetical Sketches--1783" appears in the auction catalogue but as lot 6577 and on page 302, not as the bibliographers note. According to the priced catalogue in the Harvard College Library, the Poetical Sketches sold for six shillings sixpence, a respectable price for the sale, on the thirtieth day of the auction, December 5, 1807.

A second Blake item, not listed in Bentley and Nurmi, was sold nine days later among the prints and manuscripts. Lot 8936 (on page 404 of the catalogue) contained an unspecified number of prints including "Designs to a Series of Ballads, by Hayley, engraved by Blake, 2 No. 1802"--clearly Bentley and Nurmi number 375. This reference is the fifth known type-printed allusion to Blake during 1807 (see A Blake Bibliography, p. xvii). The entire lot, with the now very rare "Designs," brought eleven shillings sixpence.

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2. "Blake and Tradition"

I read with great interest the review of Blake and Tradition in your issue of December 15th by Professor Daniel Hughes. In this review Professor Hughes states that Keynes does not agree with my interpreta-

tion of the Arlington Court Tempera as an illustration of Porphyry's de Antro Nympharum, translated by Thomas Taylor. This is not so. Sir Geoffrey Keynes was one of the first Blake scholars to assent to this view, which he holds to be conclusive. I remember his asserting - as a doctor he was well able to judge - to my description of the gesture of the kneeling figure as that of "throwing with averted face," attributed to Odysseus in this work. He has since confirmed in writing his agreement with my interpretation.

I may add that he caught me out badly on another anatomical error - the sex in the figure in the lower panel of Jerusalem Plate 33!

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REVIEWS

1. G. E. Bentley, Jr. Blake Records. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969. 678 / xxviii pp. / 60 plates. £8. 10s.

In an earlier age of scholarship, this book would have been called "Materials Toward a Biography" of William Blake, or something of that sort. Our tighter-lipped times must be content with Blake Records. Anyone who works on Blake will be grateful to Professor Bentley for this compendious labor, which comprises not only contemporary references and documents, but also four invaluable appendices: "Early Essays on Blake," "Blake Residences," "Blake Accounts," and "Engravings by and after Blake." There is also a superbly comprehensive index. If one puts down Blake Records at last with a certain feeling of frustration, this is not owing to any dissatisfaction with the book itself; it is, rather, a reflection of the present state of our knowledge about Blake. If even this enormous, rich, plum pudding of a book does not solve any of the major biographical problems about Blake, does this mean they will never be solved at all?

This is not at all to say that no important biographical data emerges from Blake Records. On the contrary, Professor Bentley has substantially increased our knowledge of Blake's life, sometimes by single discoveries, sometimes by the accumulation of detail. The possibility that Blake's father was converted to Baptism in about 1769 (pp. 7-8) is certainly a very interesting one, to say the least. The curious claim of Charles Henry Bellenden Ker that Blake had him arrested for nonpayment for two drawings must give us all pause. (See pp. 227-228). Does this indicate a hitherto unsuspected aspect of Blake's character? But how could a man be arrested for debt as a result of a verbal offer made three years previously, and why should Ker have ended up paying ten guineas more