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D I S C U S S I O N

Connoisseurship and the Palmer Fakes

Martin Butlin

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*Body of Jesus in the Sepulchre*. Pl. 82 is not of an engraving by Blake, but of an etching by Luigi Schiavonetti after Blake's (lost) drawing of *Death's Door*. The subject of pl. 106 (*Gates of Paradise*, 16) is not from the *Hermetica*; Raine has not noticed that Blake's caption is quoted from Job 17:14—in the *Notebook* sketch Blake gives the reference and the quotation in full: "I have said to corruption / thou art my father, to the worm thou art my mother & my sister / Job." In pl. 115 (frontispiece of *Gates*) Raine again misses the fact that Blake's caption is a quotation from Job 7:17. It is odd that an author who has written a book of over 300 pages subtitled *William Blake and the Book of Job* should reproduce two Job illustrations by Blake bearing captions (by the artist) quoting Job and not bother to mention the fact that these works do have something to do with the Book of Job. It would be easy to expand the list of such errors but the examples mentioned above may suffice.

To summarize my objections to Raine's book: (1) Raine's view of the relationship between spirit and matter is different from that of Blake. Hers is dualistic, his is dialectic. (2) Since Raine does not separate the knower from the known, she fails to realize that Blake as an object of knowing is separate from herself. Therefore she tends to confuse Blake's ideas with her own and makes Blake a spokesman for Raine. (3) I understand that from Raine's point of view my criticism of her book is not valid. It is the criticism of a materialist for whom the world has an autonomous existence, irrespective of a perceiving mind. I think that Blake is what he is, regardless of what I can perceive or know about him. She thinks that Raine is the "place" of Blake. Such mutually exclusive views can never be reconciled. (4) Blake's engravings are not, for Raine, works of art. They are diagrams illustrating esoteric tenets. Their meaning is explained by collecting passages from Blake's poetical works and from esoteric writings by various authors. The result is juxtaposition more than illumination; very little new light is shed on the designs. (5) Raine's attitude to Blake is sympathetic. She thinks that we should admire Blake and learn from him. Tenets which she likes are attributed to him, but he is denied views not shared by Raine. Thus she distorts him, in a friendly way. Well could Blake exclaim: "God defend me from my Friends"! I would like somebody to write a book about what he hates in Blake. Blake needs an enemy, "for Friendship's sake." He has been made too perfect a character. And, as even Raine knows, everybody hates a perfect character.

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## DISCUSSION

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*with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought*

### Connoisseurship and the Palmer Fakes

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Raymond Lister, in his review of publications on Blake and his followers, particularly Samuel Palmer, in the fall 1985 issue of *Blake* (p. 80), has chosen to repeat his accusation that I said of Keating's fake Palmers that there was "a considerable case for their being by the artist." The last time he said something of this kind, in his *The Paintings of Samuel Palmer* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), he did at least include the vital words, "was reported by *The Times* as saying. . . ." This time he merely gives a reference to *The Times* of 16 July 1976, leaving the reader, by his use of quotation marks, to assume that this is a verbatim transcript of my own words. He then goes on to assert that this "all goes to show that enthusiasm, even when combined with academic scholarship, is not always supported by perfect connoisseurship," a very happy conclusion for an enthusiastic amateur such as himself. What I did say at the time (and I have no precise recall of my exact words) came as part of a defense of one of those fooled by what was a deliberate attempt to deceive, by means of period frames, a backing of old letters, and a false provenance; I am happy to say that the words attributed to me do not reflect my opinion, then or now, of the actual authenticity of the drawings themselves. In any case it is a pity that Raymond Lister has to return on two further occasions in the course of a not very long review to the Keating scandal. This is to give the affair, and the reviewer's cleverness in not being taken in, far more attention than they deserve.