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R E V I E W

Kathleen Raine, The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job

Bo Ossian Lindberg

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Kathleen Raine. *The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job.* London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1982. 320 pp., 130 illus. $35 / £20.

Reviewed by Bo Ossian Lindberg

The audience which Kathleen Raine had in mind when she wrote *The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job* is made clear in the book's dedication "To those who study Blake for the sake of spiritual knowledge." The book is, therefore, "not primarily a work of scholarship"—as the author points out in the first sentence of the "Introduction." She is not concerned with "what Blake would have called the natural meaning of his work." On the contrary, she tries "to throw some light, for those who take things seriously, on Blake's spiritual meaning." In order to accomplish this she tries to relate Blake's twenty-two Job engravings to (1) the tradition of esoteric philosophy (the *Hermetica*, Boehme, Swedenborg, Thomas Taylor), and (2) Blake's symbolic language, "grounded . . . in not one but many branches of esoteric tradition." After a short introduction (pp. 9–24) the main body of the work is taken up by a plate-by-plate commentary on the Job engravings (pp. 25–266). Then follow an essay on "Blake's Job and Jung's Job" (pp. 267–98), additional notes on some of the plates (title, plates 2, 3, 5, 6, 13 and 15), bibliography, list of illustrations and index. While there is no conventional footnote apparatus, references to sources are largely given in the text. Thus Raine's book has the outward appearance of a scholarly work without being one.

Her "method" of investigation is based on her familiarity with the symbolic language of esoteric philosophy and on her sympathy for it. But this "method" is very unsystematic, and the question is whether it should be termed "method" at all. It may even be that Raine is against "method," because it is apt to direct thought and thus clip the wings of intellect. The lack of method is made manifest in the discrepancy between the title and the contents of the book. It is not about Blake and the Book of Job; it is a commentary on Blake's set of twenty-two engravings illustrative of the Book of Job. There is no attempt to compare Blake's Job to the Job of the Bible, and Job illustrations by Blake outside the engraved set are rarely mentioned, Job illustrations by other artists not at all. There is nothing about the role of the Book of Job in Western thought, save Jung's interpretation of it. Of the 130 illustrations, 22 are devoted to the set of engravings done by Blake in the mid-1820s at the instigation of John Linnell; of other Job illustrations by Blake 5 are reproduced (or 7, if the frontispiece and pl. 16 of *The Gates of Paradise* count as Job subjects) out of a total of about 100; there are no reproductions of Job subjects by other artists, but there are 4 reproductions of non-Job subjects by such artists; the main part of the reproductions is devoted to works by Blake not illustrative of the Book of Job. This is not necessarily a defect, but it is certainly out of keeping with Raine's subtitle, which clearly indicates a scope much wider than is actually the case, namely *William Blake and the Book of Job*.

The present reviewer, being trained to read and evaluate works of a scholarly nature, does not rightly know how to judge a work which its author denies to be scholarly. I could stretch my sympathy in order to do it, but I do not know if I should, because, despite Raine's assertions to the contrary, I do suspect that her book is a scholarly work after all. Or am I wrong in this?

In order to find out, let me try to read the book (1) as if it were a scholarly work and (2) as if it were not a scholarly work. Scholarship is founded on research, and research begins in the library, and in a good library. Having an idea is not enough for being a scholar; doing research means hard work in order to test your ideas, both for originality and for validity. If Raine were a scholar she would have liked to know what has already been published on Blake's Job before she started writing a new book on the subject, in order to test the originality, the newness, of her ideas.

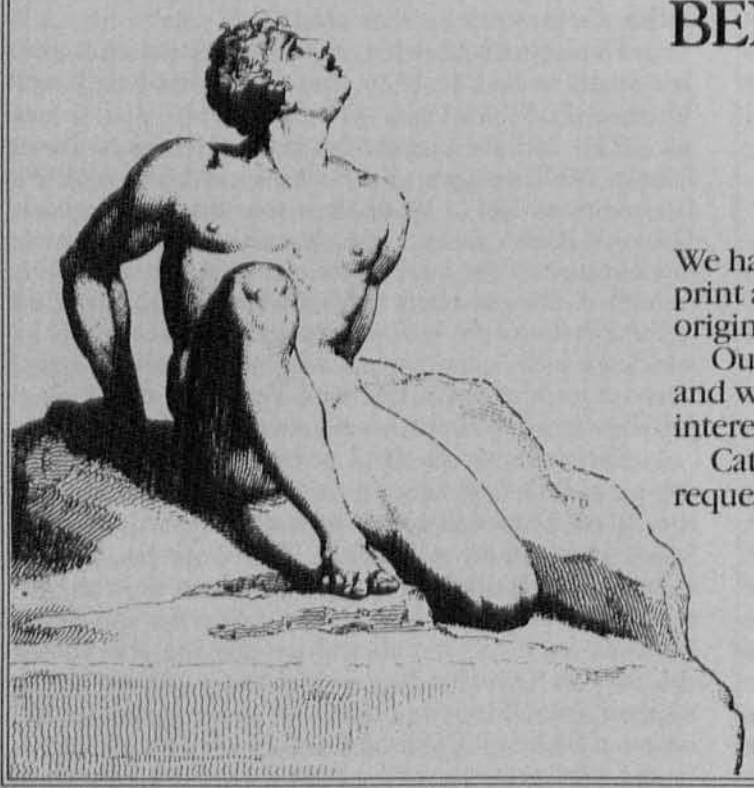
The author's knowledge of the literature on Blake's Job seems to end at 1924, and is restricted to Joseph Wicksteed's *Blake's Vision of the Book of Job* (1910, second ed. 1924) and the chapter on Blake's Job in S. Foster Damon, *William Blake, His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924, later editions 1947, 1966). It is true that Raine quotes Damon's *Blake's Job* of 1966, but this is just a separate republication of the Job chapter mentioned above, lightly reshuffled. She also refers to Michael Marqusee's *The Book of Job Illustrated by William Blake* (New York, 1976), which she calls "a convenient and pleasant working copy." It is a reprint of the Authorized Version of the Book of Job illustrated by Blake, with a short introductory essay.

This will not do for a scholarly work, especially not since Raine, among her acknowledgments, praises the "Blake Trust edition of the engravings" for being so "good it is almost a forgery." This work has not yet appeared—if Raine has seen proofs of the illustrations, some of which were exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1978, she should say so. She also thanks the late Sir Geoffrey Keynes for the support she has received from him—but Keynes' and Binyon's publication of Blake's Job illustrations (1935) does not appear in the bibliography, and nothing by Sir Geoffrey on

Blake or his Job is quoted, save the Keynes edition of Blake's writings. Raine has not bothered to check Sir Geoffrey's "Blake's *Job* on the Stage," *Blake Studies* (1971) pp. 187–94, or she would hardly have referred to the production of *Job: A Masque for Dancing* as "Robert Helpmann's ballet (first performed, with Ralph Vaughan Williams' music, in 1930)" (p. 233). Actually, the scenario is by Geoffrey Keynes and Gwen Raverat. Ninette de Valois did the choreography. At the première, in 1931, not 1930, the role of Satan was danced by Anton Dolin, not Helpmann, who danced the role in some later performances. More about the Job ballet is found in Sir Geoffrey's autobiography *Gates of Memory* (1981), pp. 203–208. Lack of attention to the particulars of bibliography must result in a number of errors. I understand that such errors belong to what Raine would call the "natural" meaning of a text. But since misrepresentations of facts are of no aid to spiritual understanding, they should be avoided in any work, regardless of what its primary aim is.

In her lack of attention to bibliography Raine goes so far as not bothering to read the Book of Job carefully enough to notice the startling differences between the story as told in the Old Testament and as represented in Blake's engravings. She writes: "For while superficially the twenty-two engraved plates faithfully follow the Story of Job as it is told in the Bible, a more careful examination shows that, as Blake himself warns us, "Both read the Bible day & night, / But thou read'st black where I read white" (p. 9). In pl. 1 Job and his family are shown reading the Lord's Prayer outside their Gothic cathedral, in pl. 5 Job shares his last meal with a beggar, in pl. 11 the God of the Mosaic Law is identified with Satan, in pl. 16 Satan is cast down at the Last Judgment, in pl. 20 Job dictates his autobiography to his daughters, and in pl. 21 Job and his family praise God, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3).

None of these scenes is found in the Book of Job. The non-biblical element in Blake's Job was noticed by Ellis and Yeats in 1893 and by Richard Garnett in 1895. Wicksteed and Damon were aware of it. These early commentators, however, explained it as a result of Blake's "personal" inventiveness. In my own *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job* (1973), I have tried to show that the non-biblical scenes have a background in the theology, folklore and iconography of the Book of Job; that, according to traditions dating from the early church



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to the eighteenth century, Job was a prefiguration of Christ, he was Christian, he was the bishop of a cathedral, he shared his last meal with a beggar, he was a prophet who could foresee that the era of the Law would be superseded by that of the Gospel, he witnessed the defeat of Satan in a vision of the Last Judgment, the Book of Job was written by Job's daughters from their father's dictation, and Job was the patron saint of musicians and singers. Raine fails to realize that Blake deviates from the text of the Book of Job not only as far as the "spiritual" interpretation of it is concerned; he changes the "natural" story itself. That Raine does not understand this is a serious flaw not only from the scholarly point of view, but also from the point of view of spiritual understanding. She presents us with a distorted Blake, one who hides his own views under a garb of esoteric symbols, while actually he is quite outspoken about the way in which he interprets and corrects Holy Scripture. And in so doing, he has tradition on his side.

What kind of man was Raine's Blake? He was an anti-materialist, who denied "that 'matter' is the substance and basis of the universe, and that matter exists autonomously outside and apart from the perceiving mind." He held that "mind, or spirit [is] the living ground and 'place' of the universe, including the sensible phenomenon we call 'nature' " (pp. 11–12). With almost no knowledge of Far Eastern thought "he had to work within the Western esoteric tradition." He knew "the canon of the European esoteric tradition." This esoteric literature "excluded as irrelevant within a materialist culture—forms a single coherent continuous tradition, which to discover at all is to discover as a whole" (p. 267). But a canon must consist of particular books, it cannot be just an indeterminate, generalized whole. According to Raine, Blake knew the Eleusinian and Bacchic mysteries and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic teachings as they were published by Thomas Taylor, the *Hermetica* translated by John Everard in 1650, the works of Jacob Boehme and the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg. This seems to be all. In which way can this disparate anthology be called a "single coherent continuous tradition"? In other places Raine writes not of one but of several different traditions or systems (p. 12). Paramount for her Blake was "the mystery of the Divine nature of Jesus Christ" (p. 10).

But what did Blake know of these works of the esoteric canon and how far did he agree with them? Which is the relationship between Blake's intellectual originality and his dependence on tradition? Raine attempts no analysis of such questions. The William Blake I know was interested in Boehme and admired the diagrams illustrating the English translation of his works, but he has not left us any detailed appreciation of Boehme; he disagreed with Swedenborg on several important points, and he hated "mystery" and mystery religions. He loved the Bible and professed himself a Bible Christian. It is true that Blake was interested in Neoplatonism and that he was familiar with the writings of Thomas Taylor—Raine's *Blake and Tradition* (1969) is much more conclusive on this point than *The Human Face of God*. It is also true that Blake was a spiritualist. But I deny that Blake was a Neoplatonist idealist in the proper sense of the word, and I hold that there is a strongly materialist element in his thought.

Of crucial importance in this context is Blake's view of the incarnation. In the incarnation the word is made flesh, spirit becomes organized in solid matter. Adam and Eve, being made in the likeness of God, and being inspirited by him, are incarnations; Christ likewise. And since Adam, Eve and Christ are human beings, man is incarnate spirit. A work of art, as Blake expressly said, is also spirit materialized. He wrote in his *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809: "The connoisseurs and artists who have made objections to Mr. B.'s mode of representing spirits with real bodies, would do well to consider that the Venus, the Minerva, the Jupiter, the Apollo, which they admire in Greek statues are all of them representations of spiritual existences, of Gods immortal, to the mortal perishing organ of sight; and yet they are embodied and organized in solid marble" (K 576). Since an icon per definition is founded on the dogma of the incarnation, and itself is an incarnation of spirit, it is right to consider Blake's pictorial works as essentially iconic—this is what Raine does. But if Blake's works are iconic, one must conclude that he has done away with the idealist dualism between conception and execution. The material painting, consisting of paint applied to a support, *is* the spiritual conception; there can be no pictorial conception outside of or apart from the material execution of a picture. The icon is the synthesis of the dialectic antitheses of spirit and matter. It should be noted that Blake did not restrict this way of thinking to the philosophy of art; in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he denied the dualism of the soul and the body. And what did he mean when he insisted that a body should be given to error? Did he not ask for incarnations of error?

All this is alien to Neoplatonist thinking, which ascribes reality only to the ideas, not to the material reflections of these ideas. In the philosophy of art, Neoplatonists hold that the artistic idea is the only true and perfect work of art, while a material work of art is seen as an imperfect approximation of the so-called "inner picture" or "vision." Unless we realize that Blake was a Christian and not a Neoplatonist we can never understand what he meant when he contended that the drawn and painted copies he made of his visions were "perfect" (see *Public Address*, K 594ff.). Raine does not go into these difficulties. Her Blake is one for whom "knowledge is a mode of being, inseparable from the living mind

Unnam'd Forms

Blake and Textuality

NELSON HILTON and
THOMAS A. VOGLER
Editors

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in which it resides . . . he . . . does not depersonify his knowledge, does not separate the knower from the known . . . he returned to the origins of all spiritual knowledge—the spiritual depths within his own humanity" (p. 11). Thus it is not only difficult to separate Blake's indebtedness to tradition from his originality—it would be impossible, even false to do so. Common scholarly work, tracking down sources, etc., would violate the Blake of Raine and misrepresent him. All right—but if Raine thinks this is true, how can she write: "He [Blake] has been credited with an originality he neither possessed nor would have wished to possess; he has been called 'wild' or even mad for repeating the theology of Plato and Plotinus . . . " (p. 11)? I think that this statement is wrong in itself, but worse is that Raine passes positive judgment on a man of whom she holds that no positive judgments can be passed.

At this point I lose sight of her vision of Blake and of the meaning she ascribes to his Job. Her work is not scholarly—but it is not unscholarly either, because she enters into arguments of a scholarly nature, disagrees with certain "academic commentators" (p. 47, no names are mentioned), uses a scholarly reference system, and formulates and defends certain theses about Blake and the Job. If her work is neither scholarly nor unscholarly, it can hardly be anything but pseudo-scholarly, that is, scholarship of a very shaky kind. I cannot see how such a book could advance either mundane knowledge or spiritual understanding.

While I disagree strongly with Raine's main arguments and with her method of investigation, I find many of her observations on details interesting and in some cases very much to the point. The comment on perfect characters (pl. 1, p. 40) which are worse than imperfect ones and are hated by everybody is illuminating. Her short analysis of the diagrammatic composition in pl. 2 is good, but the Swedenborgian analogy is not very helpful. She is right when she writes that in this plate Job is in the image of God, not God in the image of Job (as, for instance, Wicksteed has argued). Her section on the Swedenborgian correspondences between landscape and Job's state of mind is interesting, although somewhat marred by her sad dualism between spirituality and materialism (pl. 6, p. 81). Her interpretation of the significance of burnt offering (as human sacrifice, p. 263) is startling, and, I think, correct. But there is too little of this, and far too many errors.

Raine's treatment of art-historical minutiae is slovenly, and the captions for the illustrations are eccentric, to say the least. Titles are often pure inventions. Her pl. 55 (*J* 14) does not show "Satan with the planetary orbes 'rolling thro' Voidness,' " but *Erin in Albion's Tomb*. The caption of pl. 62 disregards Blake's own title given in the *Descriptive Catalogue, The Angels hovering over the*

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.

DISCUSSION

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Connoisseurship and the Palmer Fakes

Martin Butlin

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.