

LEONARD ROWE VALPY:  
PATRON OF SAMUEL PALMER AND DANTE ROSSETTI  
PART 1

Allan Life with Page Life

In March 1876, Samuel Palmer visited Burlington House to view *Callisto*, a canvas attributed to one of his ideal masters, Nicholas Poussin. As he contemplated the work, he inwardly recoiled from “a running commentary from the BRITISH PUBLIC.” “Of all who looked,” he lamented, “not one loved, not one admired, not one approved” (*Letters* 2:928).

Throughout his long career, Palmer had endured more than his share of such incomprehension. He heartily endorsed Matthew Arnold’s assault on the *Philistines*, who slighted his style of ideal landscape (*Letters* 2:760): “O! how different their masters from the working men I have heard talking together with tasteful alacrity before the Turners at South Kensington!” (*Letters* 2:929). But a working man was an unlikely purchaser of a Palmer watercolour, as unlikely as the housemaid of Lord Stafford who once “stood leaning on her broom before that wondrous Claude [Lorrain], not because it excited or gratified her curiosity, but because ‘she thought she was in Heaven’” (*Letters* 2:904). How Palmer must have longed, as he stood before the *Callisto* at Burlington House, for the companionship of his early mentor William Blake, whose praise of Claude “made sunshine” in the twilight of Hampstead, and who could exclaim before a picture they both admired: “‘As fine as possible Sir! It is not permitted to man to do better’” (*Letters* 2:573, 593).

Yet even as he deplored the iron time in which he found himself, Palmer could reflect on one middle-class patron who encouraged the most ambitious work of his later period – work which would establish him as the finest British painter of Romantic landscape after the death of Turner. For seventeen years, until Palmer’s death in 1881, Leonard Rowe Valpy subsidized the protracted execution of eight large watercolours interpreting Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (Lister, *Catalogue* M9-M27). Etched versions of two of these