

Communications

Response to Phoebe Lloyd's Review of the *Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale, Summer 2001, vol. 68 no. 2*

In her review of the *Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale*, Professor Phoebe Lloyd asserts that only those with an "unsubtle" mind could conclude that Peale was a great man. Lloyd would dismiss Peale's magnificent body of portraiture and the formidable achievement of his museum of natural history and art because he was a radical republican during the American Revolution, did not embrace pacificism, and had a difficult relationship with his eldest son. (Lloyd to the contrary, Peale did manumit his slaves according to Pennsylvania law.) With such idiosyncratic criteria, of course, there can be no "great" figures in American revolutionary history. The editors of the Peale Papers do not aspire to such subtlety. However, Lloyd's judgment of the literary form of autobiography speaks volumes about her own "subtlety." Her *shocked* conclusion is that Peale promoted himself in his autobiography. The editors are shocked! shocked! to learn that such self-promotion occurs in autobiography. We look forward to Professor Lloyd's next astonishing revelation: Franklin's autobiography is not the literal truth! To conclude, as Lloyd does, that the autobiographical viewpoint is "least helpful" to our understanding of Peale, reveals a willful blindness to the complexities of history and biography, as well as to documentary editing.

Lloyd's judgment—her *idée fixe* in diminishing Charles Willson Peale and indicting him for the murder of his eldest son, Raphaëlle—however, is not and should not be the crux of her review. What is most important is her charge that the editors of the Charles Willson Peale Papers either did not know of or deliberately censored Peale documents which are at the American Philosophical Society. This is a gross misrepresentation of our project's methodology and practice. Moreover, Lloyd's assertion of our and our project's fundamental dishonesty is contemptible. To acquaint Lloyd with our project's basic purpose: The clearly enunciated parameters of our publication project embraced three generations of the Peale family in America, beginning with Charles Peale (1701-1750), and ending with the children of Charles Willson and James Peale, which will appear in the final two volumes of the

Selected Papers. The project, in its complete microfiche edition and in the *Selected Papers*, has followed those guidelines. It also should be noted that it was the editors, not Professor Lloyd, who revealed in their 1994 article on Raphaele Peale and in volume 4 of *Selected Papers*, the missing 1825 (the year of Raphaele's death) Charles Willson Peale letter book. We did so because it was our duty as editors. We totally reject Lloyd's charge that we have exercised some sort of "censorious grasp" over the material we publish. Lloyd to the contrary, we also know full well of the papers of Escol Sellers, and have referred to them and quoted them in our annotation, when his recollections were relevant to documents we published. (And how does Lloyd know that Escol Seller's memory was "phenomenal?" Following Lloyd's criteria, are not his memories self-serving?) We are editing the Peale papers, not the Sellers papers and our guideline accordingly was not to include documents from the Sellers family, unless they are to or from a member of the three generations of the Peales. If Lloyd can specify the existence of Peale documents at the American Philosophical Society produced by the first three generations of Peales which we did not include in our publications she should do so. To not do so places her in the position of making irresponsible charges, charges made malignantly to have readers and scholars turn away from reliance on the *Selected Papers*. One additional point, Lillian B. Miller died in 1997. As one of America's eminent cultural historians, she did have her own interpretation of Peale and his place in American art and science, but as editors we do not know of a single instance where she allowed her viewpoint to interfere in the publication of the documents of the Peale Papers. You cannot libel the dead. But truth is a defense against libel, a stricture Professor Lloyd might do well to remember.

Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, *Charles Willson Peale Family Papers*, Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery