

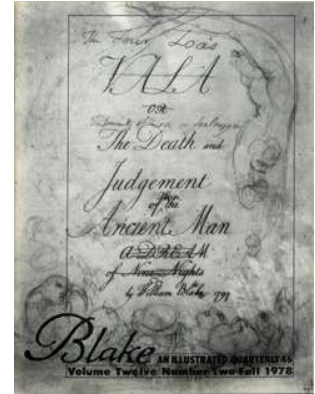
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

R E V I E W

The Book of Job Illustrated by William Blake  
(Paddington Masterpiece series)

Jeffry Spencer

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tionately, S. Palmer": Mr. Lister inserts (to) in the gap; clearly (one) is the correct reading. I am not sure that I concur with his expansion of ampersand and contractions such as "affy" for "affectionately," since he does not always expand "ye" for "the" or "wd" for "would." How very different Blake texts would look if "&" were invariably treated to editorial expansion! But these are minor inconsistencies in a remarkable feat of careful research and consistent editing which, whatever the merits of the biography, itself makes a book extraordinarily well worth reading for its account of the mind of a pathetic, lonely and pessimistic, yet distinguished man. It is a fit summary of Palmer's naivety and self-denigration, and of his lifelong earnestness in pursuit of an art which was, as Blake had taught him, at least half divine, that he should sign himself, at the conclusion of one of his last letters, "A blind baby feeling for the bosom of truth."

**The Book of Job Illustrated by William Blake.** Introduction by Michael Marqusee. Paddington Masterpieces of the Illustrated Book. London and New York: Paddington Press Ltd., Two Continents Publishing Group, 1976. 52 pp., illus. \$4.95, paper.  
**Reviewed by Jeffry Spencer**

**T**his paperback volume represents more of a tribute to Blake's marketability than to his artistry. Its modest price will ensure its popularity in museum shops from Los Angeles to London, where, regrettably, it will attract buyers who are interested in Blake but relatively uninformed about him. For their five-dollar investment they will receive a fairly competent eleven-page introduction to the poet-artist and to the Job illustrations, a thirty-five page reprint of the Book of Job in the Authorized Version, and twenty-two plates of decidedly inferior quality.

The title page of this book suggests that it has been designed as one of a series of "Masterpieces of the Illustrated Book," and Michael Marqusee's introductory essay is directed at the appreciative

amateur. Its three-part division discusses "Blake and the Bible," "Blake as a Visual Artist," and "Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job" in, respectively, three, two-and-a-half, and six double-columned pages. The brevity of these sections prevents any exploration of those complexities and contradictions that make the interpretation of Blake's works so difficult and yet so rewarding; what remains is an over-generalized, simplified rehash of prior scholarship (although no debts are acknowledged in this undocumented introduction), studded with illustrative quotations from the poetry and prose. Although there is nothing here that one can condemn as blatantly wrong-headed, there is equally little that is fresh or exciting to praise. The best that can be said is that no one coming to Blake through this introduction will be seriously misinformed. Had the publishers of this volume chosen to trim that half of its length that is given over to needlessly reprinting the entire Book of Job, replacing those pages with a more substantial introduction to the plates, the prospective purchaser would have been better served. Space might then have been found for a section listing Blake's textual variations from the King James Job, similar to the ones that appear in Foster Damon's *Blake's Job* (Brown, 1966) and in Appendix I of Andrew Wright's *Blake's Job* (Oxford, 1972). Additionally, the reader would profit from the sort of sensible analysis of the marginal texts provided by Jenijoy LaBelle in *The Visionary Hand* (ed. Robert N. Essick, Los Angeles, 1973).

Passing from text to picture provides further grounds for even deeper dissatisfaction. Reproductions are slightly larger (about five-eighths of an inch) than the originals, though this discrepancy is not noted. Such enlargement may have been deemed necessary to show detail: the printing is very dark, and highly shadowed sections of many plates are muddy and indistinct, despite the dead white paper that provides a brighter background than the grayish or creamy tones of papers used at the time of the publication of the originals. Night scenes like Plate XII ("I am Young & ye are very Old . . .") are especially poor; in this plate the outline of Elihu's figure is indistinct at the left, and the configuration of the mountain behind Job is not wholly visible. Comparing these plates, page by page, with those in the clothbound edition of *Blake's Job* published by Brown University, one cannot fail to be dismayed at the very much poorer quality of the newer set. Indeed, even the Dutton paperback version of Damon (with illustrations in reduced size) provides clearer reproduction--and at half the cost of the Paddington Press volume.

Wearied as perhaps we are by the crescendo of lamentations that bewail the encroachment of pop culture into the Temple of Art, we must regard this volume as another bit of evidence that an increasing interest in museum-going and concomitant rise in museum shop sales are combining to make ventures like this one more and more commercially rewarding. We who love Blake ordinarily rejoice when reproductions of his work are made more available and inexpensive. If, however, as here, greater accessibility is offset by a significant decrease in quality, what appears gain may well be loss.