

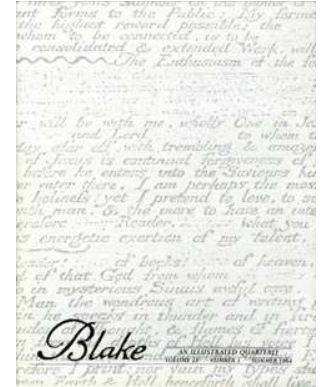
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R E V I E W

Minna Doskow, William Blake's Jerusalem: Structure and Meaning in Poetry and Picture

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linear beauty that would have required no modification from the hand of a Schiavonetti if he had ever been asked to engrave them.

Such hypotheses are in a sense futile; but the character of Blake's watercolors for *The Grave* is surely an issue which should lie at the heart of any investigation into the publication, and it is one which Essick and Paley, like everyone before them, have neglected. Perhaps the

solution is easy: we know very well what Blake's watercolors of this time looked like. But as I have indicated, they vary considerably in type and technique, and Schiavonetti's engravings imply inventions of truly exceptional magnificence and refinement. The contemplation of even imaginary drawings of this order is one of the pleasures afforded by any copy of Blake's *Grave*, and is stimulated especially by this rewarding new edition.

William Blake's *Jerusalem*

Structure and Meaning in Poetry and Picture



Minna Duskow

Minna Duskow. *William Blake's Jerusalem: Structure and Meaning in Poetry and Picture*. Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1982. \$37.50.

Reviewed by V. A. De Luca

Given the nature of Blake criticism, it was perhaps inevitable that a book like this on *Jerusalem* should come along. Blake's other long poems have received whole

monographs of elaborate commentary in recent years and *Jerusalem* could not avoid its turn. Minna Duskow's book is an attempt to answer an old question: What is the governing principle behind the poem's four-part structure? Her method is also familiar; it is a thematic paraphrase proceeding more or less consecutively plate by plate through the poem. The "Structure and Meaning" of her subtitle are one; *Jerusalem's* structure is a structure of meanings, meanings of an abstract didactic sort. With a kind of relentless zeal Duskow now undertakes to reveal what she believes to be *Jerusalem's* didactic structure.

She begins in a promising way, noting that "all the poem's parts fall into pieces of a kaleidoscopic whole complementing and reinforcing one another. Each chapter turns the kaleidoscope to view the theme in a new way. The pieces recombine themselves in new patterns and seem to reveal new appearances of the whole but are only actualizing those patterns potentially present all along" (p. 15). So far, so good; this is always the impression that repeated experience of the poem gives. But having correctly pointed out the contradictory results of previous critics' attempts to elicit a four-part thematic scheme out of *Jerusalem*, Duskow quixotically proceeds on precisely the same sort of attempt herself. She discovers her structure of meaning in the hypothesis that *Jerusalem* is an exposé of Albion's errors. There are three chief errors. The first chapter surveys all three; as for the rest, "in chapter 2 Blake reveals all these distortions [of perception, understanding, feeling and action] growing from the soil of Albion's religious error. In chapter 3, on the other hand, he shows them sprouting from philosophical error, and in chapter 4 from affective error" (p. 71). These categories are derived from the three addresses "To the Jews" (patriarchal religion, Druidism, imputation of sin), "To the Deists" (rationalism, natural law), and "To the Christians" (repudiation of the affections, of imagination, of liberty-named-Jerusalem).

Now there is nothing inherently implausible about this categorical organization. If one were to speak of associative thematic clusters in these chapters, of gravitational drifts influenced by the introductory address, there would be no quarrel; but then there would also be no special originality in such an insight and no very long

book either. Dostow, however, proposes a more rigorous structure: the content of each chapter is to be explained exclusively and entirely in terms of its ruling "error." Even Chapter I, the general survey of Albion's error, is in fact parceled out to the various particular errors; thus, pls. 6-10 give us religious error (the controversy of Los and his Spectre is a religious one), 11-15 is philosophic error, 16-25 affective. Blake, we learn, adopts an "orderly procedure of exposing one aspect of error after another in the poem" (p. 27). It is nearly as orderly as drill at a military academy and not very much like the Blake we thought we knew. Perhaps sensing this, Dostow clearly feels the necessity to justify her bold but narrow principles with every mode of argument at her disposal.

There is indeed something forensic about this book. Part of the effect comes from a prosecutorial tone, inevitable when the word "error" is repeated dozens of times and applied to dozens of contexts. Every passage and design in the poem either reveals redemption from error or error itself; thus even something ostensibly as neutral in moral terms as the correlation of Hebrew tribes and English counties on pl. 16 is a sign of Albion's "religious errors" (p. 54). Moreover these errors must be *proved*, and a courtroom full of argumentative devices is deployed to do the job. Wherever the text itself gives Dostow what she needs she is content to quote; but where the text is more recalcitrant she relies on shiftier means—*obiter dicta*, selective quotation, close reading when that will tease out a lurking error, distanced, glancing reading to hurry through passages that cannot be so teased, circular reasoning, and self-contradiction.

In a limited space like this, a few examples will have to suffice to indicate what I mean. Take pl. 26, one of the full-page illuminations that are said to provide a "thematic frontispiece" (p. 20) to the chapters they precede. This design showing Hand and Jerusalem is supposed to announce visually a chapter on "religious error." Yet it is here that we find the inscription "Jerusalem is named Liberty among the Sons of Albion." But offenses against Jerusalem as a principle of liberty are, according to Dostow's scheme, assigned to Chapter IV of the poem, affective error, not Chapter II. If the frontispiece is intended to present an unmistakable signal about the focus of the ensuing chapter, what is this plate doing in front of Chapter II? Dostow copes with this problem by arguing that Hand "symbolizes religious error" (p. 21), later adducing some iconographical evidence to back up her point (p. 33). But why give preferential weight to Hand's significance over Jerusalem's significance, particularly since her significance is stressed by a motto etched on the design? Nor do Dostow's problems end here. If Hand does in fact symbolize "religious error" (and this is itself disputable), why is it that elsewhere he "portrays Bacon, Newton, and Locke" (p. 53) in the "deist" portion of Chapter I and again in Chapter III? And why is he iden-

tified as the beaked giant that presides over the opening of Chapter IV, an incarnation of affective error (p. 142)? If, however, Hand is an Individual passing through various States of error, can he be said to "symbolize" anything? In other words, can his presence be taken as a stable point of reference that gives determinate meaning to any context in which he appears? Unfortunately for Dostow, the meaning-controls in *Jerusalem* are all unstable, and the "errors" will not stay in their assigned places but slide together and fraternize.

When things get really difficult for her scheme, Dostow often simply decides to look the other way. This may happen when Blake himself is most explicit in the delineation of an error. Here are some very famous lines from *Jerusalem*:

Hence the Infernal Veil grows in the disobedient Female:
Which Jesus rends & the whole Druid Law removes away
From the Inner Sanctuary: a False Holiness hid within the
Center,
For the Sanctuary of Eden. is in the Camp; in the Outline,
In the Circumference: & every Minute Particular is Holy:
Embraces are Cominglings from the Head even to the Feet;
And not a pompous High Priest entering by a Secret Place.

Everything in this passage points to a delineation of what Dostow defines as "religious error": the imagery of Druid Law, High Priest, Veil, and Sanctuary embodying the worst aspects of the Jewish patriarchal religion that is presumably exposed on pl. 27, a religion that turns sexuality to pious hypocrisy. But famous as it is, Dostow neither quotes nor mentions this passage in her commentary. The lines appear, after all, on plate 69, deep within a chapter that is supposed to be devoted to *rational*, not religious error. Their presence in Chapter III is an embarrassment to her scheme and is therefore ignored. Such considerations may account for the neglect in Dostow's commentary of other significant passages, most notably the description of the building of Golgonooza on pl. 12. Perfunctorily identified as redemptive (p. 56), it is otherwise passed over; its dazzling, exuberant imagery holds little allure for Dostow, contributing as it does next to nothing to the uncovering of "rational error," the supposed topic of these particular plates in Chapter I. And so with many other negligences, large and small. Whenever Dostow is faced with the choice of fidelity to the contours of the text or the preservation of her scheme, she opts for the scheme and swerves from the text.

In the end all these strategies are in vain. I will offer two reasons. First, Dostow's organizational model is almost certainly incorrect: Blake does not proceed in an "orderly" fashion, sorting out the nuanced variations of Albion's primal error and depositing them in separate bins labeled as chapters; he proceeds on all fronts at once, showing the varieties of fallen thought together on nearly every plate, superimposed as in a transparent palimpsest or inextricably knotted. Dostow sometimes assumes this in practice but never admits it as an organizational prin-

ciple. The second reason is more fundamental. Like many other Blake studies before it, this book rests on the tacit assumption that the only way of finding coherence and unity in Blake is to find it in a ruling didactic intent; hence the emphasis on "errors" and thematic paraphrase. Blake himself offers the definitive word on this approach: "It is the same with the Moral of a whole Poem as with the Moral Goodness of its parts Unity and Morality, are secondary considerations and belong to Philosophy & not to Poetry, Exception and not to Rule, to Accident and not to Substance, the Ancients called it eating of the tree of good and evil ("On Homer's Poetry," E 269-70). Daskow is but one of many people who are attracted to Blake primarily as a master of moral certainty and who, as critics, tend to neglect other dimensions of his genius as a poet-artist. Thus Daskow shows no interest in the texture of *Jerusalem's* verse, the surface movement of its narrative, the organization of its episodes, the technique and placement of the designs. She does not consider the poem's bibliographical cruxes, its generic antecedents, or its literary-historical context, nor does she show any awareness that a study of these topics would yield a more capacious view of "structure and meaning" than the pursuit of didactic unity can afford.

This book, then, in its emphasis on moral unity is profoundly un-Blakean. Yet it would be improper to lay the entire onus for its limitations on its author, whose investment of labor and dedication, evident throughout, commands a certain admiration. Daskow has the sanction of a long tradition of Blakean interpretation in which certain abstract terms, most often not the poet's, are reified and then imposed on his creations to direct (or misdirect) our understanding of them. She also works within a context of academic institutional imperatives which stress finding a clearly demarcated topic and riding it as hard as one can—and, usually, as fast as one can. There are, in fact, certain earmarks of haste in the book. Such a circumstance might account for the frequent patches of clumsy writing, for the uncaught typos, and for a scattering of—the word is unavoidable—errors. Some are probably mistranscriptions such as the citation of pl. 15 where 14 is meant (p. 54) or the substitution of pl. 39 for 37 (p. 48, 3rd paragraph); others are factual. For the record, Reuben is the son of Jacob, not of Isaac (p. 76); the four unfallen cathedral cities are London, Verulam, York, and Edinburgh, not Canterbury, Verulam, and the other two (p. 83); the dome of St. Paul's is not Byzantine (p. 99) but Baroque or late Renaissance; the title of the address that precedes the first chapter of the poem is "To the Public," not "To the General Public" (pp. 21, 29).

But enough of errors, or too much. Despite its limitations and blemishes, this is a book that most students of Blake will want to have. One of its real contributions is a reading of nearly every design in *Jerusalem*. Informed readers of Blake may find Daskow's generaliz-

ing paraphrases of the text dispensable, since they do little that readers cannot do for themselves, but turning mute designs into meaning is another matter, demanding an attention to graphic detail and coloring. Here it is often painstakingly supplied. Many of her readings are of course disputable and one should always be wary of her special biases, but the interpretations as a whole offer an alternative to Erdman, her only rival in this area. Although nothing can supersede the special pleasures of *The Illuminated Blake*, it is sometimes good to have a second opinion. But the real treasure of this book is its reproduction of the entire Rinder facsimile (Copy C) of *Jerusalem*. Here between compact covers, not overly reduced and interrupted by commentary as in *The Illuminated Blake*, not unwieldy and costly as in Bindman's *Complete Graphic Works*, is a convenient clear reproduction of *Jerusalem*, an ideal reading text. Minna Daskow has performed a genuine service to students of Blake in making this text available as part of her work.

DISCUSSION

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

Blake/Hegel/Derrida: A response to Nelson Hilton's review of *Blake, Hegel and Dialectic*

By David Punter

I found Nelson Hilton's review of my *Blake, Hegel and Dialectic* quite a surprise,¹ chiefly because it lifted the theoretical level of the discourse well beyond the book's own plane. Hilton did this, of course, by establishing and concentrating on a significant absence (one of many): the absence of Derrida. And in adopting this procedure, he therefore carried out precisely a Derridean maneuver: by