

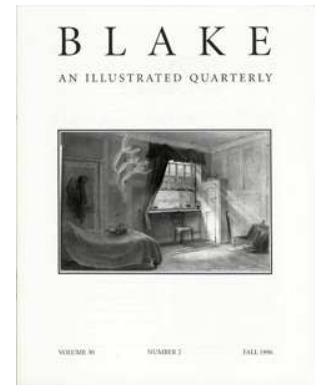
# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

William Blake, Jacob Ilive, and the Book of Jasher

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believe the whole Body Series[?] and Contents thereof to be all of the proper hand writing and Subscription of the said James Parker deceased / Sarah Parker Hse[?] Servant Richard Golding The same day the said Sarah Parker Spinster Ann Pickering Servant Spinster and Richard Golding were duly sworn to the Truth of this affidavit before me S Parson Surrogate pros.<sup>3</sup> Geo: Bogg Not. Pub.

This Will was proved at London on the nineteenth Day of November in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five before the worshipful [three names illeg] Doctor of Laws Surrogate of the Right Honourable Sir William Eyres Knight Doctor of Laws Master [word illeg] Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury lawfully instituted by the oath of Sarah Parker Spinster the Sister of the Deceased and his sole Executrix named in the Said Will to whom administration of all and singular the Goods Chattels and Credits of the deceased was granted she having before first sworn duly to administer.

The Will demonstrates that James Parker was a man of some substance (unlike his sometime partner William Blake), with two rental properties plus his house in Spring Place, Kentish Town, with a Summer House. He apparently had no wife or children surviving, his married sister Mary Nixon was dead, and his only relatives were his spinster sister Sarah Parker and his nieces Ann, Lavinia, and Mary Nixon. And he was sufficiently prosperous to have a servant, Ann Pickering, who was with him for nine years. (William and Catherine Blake had a servant when they lived in Lambeth but soon gave her up.)

Notice, however, that among his "household Goods Prints Debts Mortgages" specified in the Will there is no reference to a rolling press. William Blake certainly had a rolling press on which he printed his own engravings, and it has been supposed that he acquired it by the time that he and Parker set up their print-selling business in 1784.<sup>3</sup> Blake was apparently unusual in owning his own rolling press.

Parker's Numerous Assemblage of Prints, together with his Coins and Medals, were sold at auction by Thomas Dodd on 18 February 1807.

It is likely that Blake visited Parker and his sister Sarah at their home in Spring Place, Kentish Town, and it is pleasant to think that Blake may have accompanied the Governors of the society of Engravers to the grave in St Clement Danes<sup>4</sup> when James Parker was buried.

James Parker's Will throws a good deal of domestic light upon a man who was very important in the life of William Blake.

<sup>3</sup> *Blake Records* (1969) 29.

<sup>4</sup> Obituary of James Parker in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 75 (June 1805) 586.

## William Blake, Jacob Ilive, and the Book of Jasher

BY MORTON D. PALEY

William Blake was, as we know, very interested in research on and speculation about the Bible, including matters such as Hebrew prosody, theories of composition, and the constitution of texts.<sup>1</sup> He was also, aware of the tradition that there were lost books of the Bible as is shown in plate 12 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*;<sup>2</sup> as well as by his eagerness to illustrate the Book of Enoch after its publication in 1821.<sup>3</sup> In Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion*, Blake would have read that one of these, the Book of Jasher, was extant "amongst the People who live in Great Tartary."<sup>4</sup> Blake did not, of course, respond to ideas on such subjects as a scholar but rather as a poet and artist, placing himself in relation to new knowledge by assimilating it. The fact that a work purporting to be the lost book of Jasher (or Jashar) had been published in his own century must have been known to him, especially as it had been produced by a man well known in the printing profession, one whose heterodox religious ideas had some common ground with his own. The fact that this work was widely considered a forgery would hardly have deterred Blake, whose characteristic view was that not the literal fact of production but the inner meaning of a work determines its authenticity. As he wrote in his annotations to Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, "I cannot conceive the Divinity of the <books in the> Bible to consist either in who they were written by or at what time or in the historical evidence which may be all false in the eyes of one man & true in the eyes of another but in the Sentiments & Examples which whether true or Parabolic are Equally useful . . ." (E 618). In the 1751 *Book of Jasher* Blake may well have found useful sentiments and examples, as well as a model for the layout of part of his own Bible of Hell, *The [First] Book of Urizen*.

The Book of Jasher is considered a lost source for parts of other books in which it is named, including Joshua 10-

<sup>1</sup> See Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982) 25-54; Morton D. Paley, *The Continuing City* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1983) 45-48; and Jerome J. McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 152-72.

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 39, hereafter cited as *E* followed by the page number.

<sup>3</sup> See Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981) 1: 595.

<sup>4</sup> See my "A New Heaven Is Begun": Blake and Swedenborgianism," *Blake* 13 (1979): 80.

# ¶ The Book of JASHER.

1 Heb. The Upright.

## CHAP. I.

1 The formation of the world; 3 the light shineth; 7 the earth is productive; 11 the creation of man; 13 the birth of Cain and Abel; 17 of Enosh; 23 the death of Adam.

A. M.

1. Heb. the prime.  
2. Heb. the desert.  
3. Heb. the atoms.  
4. Heb. confused mass of matter.

5. Heb. the flame; Or, burning.  
6. Heb. the bottomless pit.



**V**ILST it was the beginning: darkness overspread the face of nature.

2 And the æther moved: upon the surface of the chaos.

3 And it came to pass, that a great light shone forth from the firmament: and enlightened the abyss.

4 And the abyss fled before the face of the light: and divided between the light and the darkness.

5 So that the face of nature was formed: a second time.

6 And behold there appeared in the firmament two great lights: the one to rule the light, and the other to rule the darkness.

7 And the ground brought forth grass: the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree after his kind.

8 And every beast after his kind: and every thing that creepeth after their kind.

9 And the waters brought forth the moving creature after their kind.

10 And the æther brought forth every winged fowl after his kind.

11 ¶ And when all these things were fulfilled: behold JEHOVAH appeared in Eden, and created man, and made him to be an image of his own eternity.

12 And to him was given power and lordship over all living creatures: and over every herb, and over every tree of the field.

13 And it came to pass, in process of time, that the man conceived, and brought forth Cain: and he conceived again and brought forth his brother Abel.

14 And Cain was the first man who tilled the ground: B

A. M.

1. Heb. the earth; Or, nature.

2. Heb. finished.

3. Heb. I am that I am.

4. Heb. delighted.

5. Heb. likeness.

6. Heb. rule.

7. Heb. the possessed.

8. Heb. the feeder.

13, 2 Samuel 1:18, and the Septuagint version of 1 Kings 8: 53.<sup>5</sup> In 1751, a printer named Joseph Ilive published what he claimed was an English version by the monk Alcuin: *The Book of Jasher, with Testimonies and Notes explanatory of the Text*. Ilive himself is a figure of some interest. The son of a printer, he set up a letter-foundry in Aldersgate c. 1730.<sup>6</sup> In 1733 he gave an oration at Joyner's Hall in Thames Street, pursuant to the will of his late mother, Jane Ilive, who may have been one of the Philadelphian circle around Jane Leade. In this discourse, which he published that same year, he maintained four principal theses:

<sup>5</sup> "Book of Jasher," *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (New York and Oxford: Facts on File, 7th ed., 1992), s.v. "Jasher" is not a name (as is sometimes supposed) but Hebrew for "the upright one."

<sup>6</sup> H. R. Plomer, in *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were At Work in England[,] Scotland[,] and Ireland from 1726 to 1775* (Oxford: Printed for the Bibliographical Society at the Oxford University Press, 1932 [for 1930]) 136.

I The Plurality of Worlds

II That this Earth is Hell.

III That the Souls of Men are Apostate Angels. And

IV That the fire which will punish those who shall be confined to this Globe after the Day of Judgment will be immaterial.<sup>7</sup>

In 1750, addressing his fellow master printers, he said "It may with Great Veracity be affirmed, that there is no Art, Science, or Profession in the World, but what owes its Origin, at least its Progress and present Perfection, to the free Exercise of the Art of Printing," and he went on to defend "the Liberty of the Press."<sup>8</sup> Prosecuted in 1756 for printing his own *Modest Remarks upon the Discourses of the Bishop of*

<sup>7</sup> The Oration Spoke at Joyners hall in Thames Street on Monday, Sept. 24, 1733, t.p.

<sup>8</sup> The Speech of Mr. Jacob Ilive to His Brethren the Master-Printers (1750).

London (Dr. Sherlock),<sup>9</sup> Ilive was imprisoned for over a year, during which he took the opportunity to write and publish *Reasons offered for the Reformation of the House of Correction in Clerkenwell* (1757). We may well imagine that William Blake would have found Ilive's story of some interest.

*The Book of Jasher* was recognized as a forgery from the first. *The Monthly Review* declared it was "a palpable piece of contrivance intended to impose on the credulous, and the ignorant, and to sap the credit of the books of Moses, and blacken the character of Moses himself."<sup>10</sup> The circumstances of the hoax were recounted in 1778 by Edward Rowe-Mores, in his *Dissertation Upon English Typographical Founders and Foundries*:

... Of the publication we can say from the information of the Only-One who is capable of informing us, because the business was a secret between the Two: Mr. Ilive in the night-time had constantly an Hebr. bible before him (*sed. q. de hoc*) and cases in his closet. He produced the copy for *Jasher*, and it was composed in private, and the forms worked off in a private press-room by these Two after the men of the printing-house had left their work. (65)

That this exposure did not cause *The Book of Jasher* to disappear entirely from view is shown by the republication of Ilive's text in 1829.<sup>11</sup> Blake, with his interest in biblical antiquities and his connections with the printing trade, would have had ample opportunity to know the first edition. It is interesting to consider what distinctive features might have interested him most.

In *Jasher* 3: 19 Abraham is talked out of sacrificing Isaac by Sarah, who says "The holy voice hath not so spoken." As a result, "Abraham repented him of the evil he purposed to do unto his son: his only son Isaac." The Egyptians do not pursue the Hebrews into the Red Sea but go home instead (10: 24). Moses is frequently depicted as acting tyrannically. When Miriam opposes his appointing of judges, Moses hides her for seven days until she is released by the demand of the congregation, who prefer her view to his; but after Miriam's death Moses appoints 70 elders to rule the people (15). In the course of establishing the priesthood of the Levites, Moses has 250 who oppose him killed (22). When Shelomith protests against the laws Aaron gives to the people, he is stoned to death by order of Moses. Achan too

<sup>9</sup> *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, in London, Westminster, and Southward*, 4 vols. (London, 1808) 2: 290-92.

<sup>10</sup> 5 (December 1751): 520.

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Hartwell Hone, B.D., *Bibliographical Notes on the Book of Jasher* (London, 1833). S. T. Coleridge, commenting on this edition, thought it was based on one of the "slovenly Eutropius-like Abridgements of the Pentateuch & the books of Joshua & Judges by some ignorant Monk" (*The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956-72] 6: 900).



2 William Blake, *The [First] Book of Urizen*. Copy C. Plate 3. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

is stoned to death, not because of his sin in appropriating part of the spoil of Jericho devoted to God (as in Joshua 7) but because he challenged the giving of the spoils to the tribe of Levi (28: 20-23). At the end of the book, Joshua makes peace with the kings of Canaan. This altered narrative, emphasizing humanitarian values, casting Moses as an authoritarian power-figure, and endorsing rebellion against tyrannical law, would have found a sympathetic reader in Blake. Of course not all of Ilive's recasting of biblical material is of this nature. For example, his account of the parting of the Red Sea is rationalistic: Moses says, "It is now midnight, and by the time of the cock-crow the Red Sea will be dried up: and peradventure we may cross over dry-shod into the wilderness" (10: 24). Blake preferred miracles, but that did not prevent him from defending the deist Thomas Paine against Bishop Watson. In such instances he was more conscious of similarities than of differences.

A further point of comparison may be made between the format of *The Book of Jasher* and that of *The [First] Book of Urizen*. Both works, as can be seen in the illustrations (illus. 1 and 2), exploit the familiar layout of the Authorized Version and some other English Bibles: a double-columned page divided into chapters and verses. Of course Blake is

unique in his combination of design and calligraphic text; Ilive's decorated initial capital is his only gesture in this direction. Nevertheless, both play upon the reader's experience of opening a conventional Bible, only to present a text subversive of such a Bible. Finally, just as *Jasher* concludes after its last verse (37: 32) "*The End of the Book of Jasher*," *Urizen* concludes "*The End of the [first] book of Urizen*" (E 83), both in imitation of colophons in medieval texts. Did Blake recognize Ilive's private press-room as a forerunner of his own Printing House in Hell?

## R E V I E W S

William Blake, *The Continental Prophecies: America: a Prophecy; Europe: a Prophecy; The Song of Los*. Edited with Introductions and Notes by D. W. Dörrbecker. Princeton: William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press, 1997. Blake's Illuminated Books Volume 4. General Editor David Bindman. 367 pp. \$75.

Reviewed by MICHAEL J. TOLLEY

This series of Blake's Illuminated Books is a noble one, and as I have read carefully through Detlef Dörrbecker's book I have felt like somebody reading a kind of variorum edition. Many viewpoints are presented from a number of leading critics, and particularly of recent writers, though also with representation of the major earlier studies. In his establishment of the historical background to the text, new works have aided the editor considerably, as they have also aided his insistence on a free, open, but well-advised approach to the reading of the numerous difficulties. Individual scholars will retain the liberty in studying these libertarian works to develop their own researches, but they will do so on the basis of some sound counsel.

"Continental Prophecies" is not a familiar phrase, but this division of the Lambeth books is most helpful. In particular, it draws attention to *The Song of Los* as a considerable work in the threefold scheme. The works are discussed together (11-24) in a prefatory essay, and then each is presented in turn, first by means of a discussion of the text, then by a study of the designs, then by the illustrations with the printed text, some supplementary illustrations, and some notes to Blake's text. This division means that the reader has to do some flipping backwards and forwards, but the editor has explained his pattern of work in "A Note on Citations, Abbreviations, Texts, and Variants" and also his brief system of annotation through simple references to the

"Works Cited." The reader will doubtless have a problem in laying hands on each item in the thorough bibliography which Dörrbecker has had the benefit of studying through his work at *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, but the problem is like every problem in Blake studies—all you need is intelligence, time, money and access to a superb library!

That major themes in each poem are discussed first, before the plates themselves and the textual footnotes, necessarily involves some repetition (chasing after, say, the nameless shadowy female or Albion's 'Angel'). This was presumably considered worthwhile, but readers should be warned. It seems that most of the significant matters of theme and context get considered somewhere or other in the discussions.

Some decisions are bound to be a little irritating. Quite sensibly, in his own terms, the editor has decided to ignore changes in the text from, say, roman to italic type. When one reads, say, the titlepage to "AMERICA / a / PROPHECY," one expects the last word to be in italics, but it is not. This demands a note when the page is discussed, but in the note we are told that the same kind of titlepage in *Europe* reverses the order—"EUROPE / a / PROPHECY." However, as soon as one looks at the pages, one sees that more is going on in the *Europe* titlepage than this, even with the lettering. One thing which is not noticed, though perhaps worth noticing, is the way in which the final Y looks like a tree in *Europe* and almost like a tree in *America*. However, there is so much to notice in the Michelangesque figures of *America's* frontispiece and titlepage—which are described as a diptych (48)—that one is hardly likely to worry about the putative decorative or illustrative gesture on each single word. The editor is wise to suggest that the reader should not think of Abdiel and Abdias when looking at the wailing mother in the frontispiece and the reading "sibyl" (if that is what she is) in the titlepage. The context must change the significance of a figure which may nevertheless come from a classic design—and this is equally true in many of the textual allusions. Accordingly, I would not say that "[l]ike Milton's Messiah in *Paradise Lost*" the Guardian Prince is "armed with diseases . . . to rage bacteriological war." The Messiah's plagues are mental blows, not merely "mythic plagues," and I would rather say that the Guardian Prince is "Unlike Milton's Messiah." Nevertheless, one has to acknowledge the Miltonic reference before worrying about the difference between the Prince and the Son of God. It is no wonder that art historians and students of intertextuality find the previous scholarly work of identification of a "source" with a text enough to have achieved. Blake was some way ahead of modern scholars and critics in his narrative insights.

In *America*, the chained figure that squats, though winged, in the breach of the wall in the frontispiece should perhaps have been related by Dörrbecker to biblical passages of which he seems aware in his note on the text (134 on