

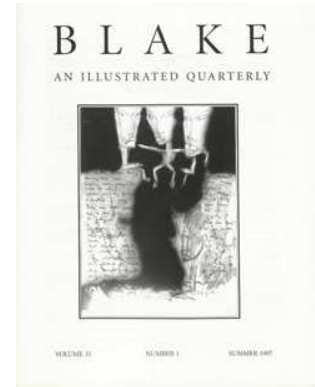
# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

A R T I C L E

## Not from Troy, But Jerusalem: Blake's Canon Revision

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## Not from Troy, But Jerusalem: Blake's Canon Revision

BY R. PAUL YODER

In chapter 2 of Blake's *Jerusalem* Los undertakes an investigative quest that I have come to see as emblematic of Blake's own quest in relation to England:

Fearing that Albion should turn his back against the Divine Vision

Los took the globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering the caves Of despair & death, to search the tempter out, walking among

Albions rocks & precipices! Caves of solitude & dark despair,

And saw every Minute Particular of Albion degraded & murdered

But saw not by whom.

(*Jerusalem* 45: 2-8, E 194)

Los's search provides a good way to think about the Blake who emerges from a roughly chronological reading of the illuminated books. From the initial assertion by the "Voice of one Crying in the Wilderness" that "All Religions are One" to *The Ghost of Abel*, addressed to Byron in the Wilderness, Blake sets forth principles ("All Religions are One" "There is No Natural Religion"), identifies social and moral problems (*Songs*), provides admonitory exempla (*Thel*, *Visions*), satirizes his adversary (*Marriage*), mythologizes history (*America*, *Europe*), and then begins a series of books (the "minor" prophecies) that seeks to get at the genesis of the wilderness of England. By the time he etched *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake had discovered what he took to be the source of England's problems; he had discovered the error that had led to Albion's continuing fall and fragmentation: the acceptance of the classical epic tradition, as embodied in the myth of Trojan Brutus as the founder of the British nation. In order to correct England's error, Blake recognized that, like Milton, he had to write an English myth of origin.

Milton, of course, set the stage for such a rewriting of English mythic history, and not only in *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Regained* the Savior himself authorizes a dismantling of the classical tradition, saying,

Who therefore seeks in these  
True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion  
Far worse, her false resemblance only meets,  
An empty cloud.

(*Paradise Regained* 4.318-21)

More important to my discussion is Milton's recognition of this falsity at the outset of his *History of Britain*.



Here Milton remarks that of the tales he is about to relate, "That which we have of oldest seeming, hath by the greater part of judicious antiquaries been long rejected for a modern fable" (*Columbia Prose* 2, *Yale Prose* 2-3). After a brief comment on the tendency of time to change fiction to fact and visa versa, Milton adds that he has "therefore determined to bestow the telling over even of these reputed tales; be it for nothing else but in favor of our English poets and rhetoricians, who by their art will know how to use them judiciously" (*Columbia Prose* 2-3, *Yale Prose* 3). The tale Milton has in mind is the English myth of national origin popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the myth of the founding of the British people by Trojan Brutus. The myth of Brutus had been severely undermined by Polydore Vergil, but Milton here suggests that even such a rejected myth might be turned to good use by future writers.

It is easy to see why Milton thought the myth might prove useful to others, for it is in the myth of Trojan Brutus that the political and the aesthetic are most obviously joined. The story of Brutus supported the English appropriation of classical authority at both an ideological and a poetic level. The poetic myth, Christianized by Milton in the "Nativity Ode," and perhaps epitomized in Thomas Gray's *Progress of Poesy*, claims a movement of the classical muse from Greece to Rome to England. This historical/geographical "Westerling," as it is sometimes known, is evident in the epic high marks—Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and these epics are also associated with turning points in the various national myths—the gathering and death of the Greek heroes at Troy, Aeneas's flight from fallen Troy to found Rome, the founding of a decidedly English-sounding human race. Paralleling this poetical progress is a racial continuity in which the line of Priam, King of Troy, is continued in Rome through Aeneas, and in England through Aeneas's great-grandson, Brutus, commonly known as "Trojan Brutus." Moreover, in Gray's *Progress*, which Blake illustrated, this westward movement is explicitly ideological, for the departure of the poetic muse for a new home in the west is always a consequence of the collapse of liberty first in Greece and then in Rome, until muse and ideology find a home in England. So it is that in his aborted epic, *Brutus*, Alexander Pope recognized Trojan Brutus, the descendant of Priam, as the "Patient Chief" who brought "Art Arms and Honour" to England's "Ancient Sons" (1-3).

Pope's muse in this fragment suggests how Blake may have responded to the myth of Brutus, for Pope invokes the "Daughter of Memory" (4) to inspire him, and so in Blake's eyes, Pope's project would have been doomed from the start. Indeed, as Hugh A. MacDougall has shown, this Trojan myth of origin "had spent itself" by the mid-eighteenth century, to be replaced by an alternative myth of "Anglo-Saxonism," sometimes called "Gothicism," which posited a different point of origin and implied a different ideology (26). This transition corresponds to a change in

attitude at this time toward the classics. Stuart Curran, for example, has documented the growing criticism of Homer, Virgil, and the classical tradition during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Joel Barlow's remark that Homer's "existence has really proved one of the signal misfortunes of mankind" (in Curran 170). Barlow charges that Homer's poems tend

to inflame the minds of young readers with an enthusiastic ardor for military fame; to inculcate the pernicious doctrine of the divine right of kings; to teach both prince and people that military plunder was the most honorable mode of acquiring property; and that conquest, violence and war were the best employment of nations. (Curran 170)

Barlow's criticism of the epical warrior ethic is very similar to what Anne Mellor has noted as "feminine Romanticism's" rejection of "the epic, with its implicit assumption that the male hero embodies the character and aspirations of the nation and thus is 'representative' of mankind" (6). For my purposes the important point here is that for these writers canon revision is political and social reform.

It is in this context that less than 40 years after Pope's death, Blake satirizes the "Patient Chief," "Trojan Brutus," in *King Edward the Third*; in his prophetic song-within-a-song Brutus foretells a time when "Our sons shall rule the empire of the sea (6:42, E 438), and his speech both recalls and undermines the imperial prophecies of "Old Father Thames" for England in Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, and of Pope himself for Jerusalem in his "Messiah." In Blake's play, a minstrel sings of the bloody battle by which Brutus and his army wrested Albion's land from the native giants, "the enormous sons / Of Ocean," and the "wild men, / Naked and roaring like lions" (vi: 20-23, E 437). Standing among the "giant bodies, streaming blood, / Dread visages, frowning in silent death," Brutus, according to the minstrel, is "inspir'd," and sings of a time when England's "mighty wings shall stretch from east to west," an image that anticipates the wings of the Covering Cherub in *Jerusalem* (vi: 37-43, E 438). In his vision of the new Troy, Brutus claims that "Liberty shall stand upon the cliffs of Albion," but this "Liberty" is like the Spectre in *Jerusalem* who keeps claiming to be God, for Brutus's Liberty also "Stretch[es] her mighty spear o'er distant lands" (vi: 55-58, E 438).

Blake's criticism of Brutus's warrior ethic—if not the connection to Pope—has been noted by Erdman and others, but my emphasis is on Blake's evolving critique of the classical canon, which leads him finally to deny the substance of Pope's claim that the descendants of Aeneas had brought art to England: in about 1820 Blake writes in *On Virgil* that "Rome & Greece swept Art into their maw & destroyed it" (E 270). For Blake, the problems of England—its imperial dreams, its aggression, its failure to support



what he saw as true art, its insensitivity to the suffering of its own people—stem from England's error in yoking its history with that of Troy. Opposed to this destructive classical myth, Blake identifies Gothicism as "living form" and associates it with a Hebraic myth. Blake's last major poem, *Jerusalem*, is his greatest effort to correct England/Albion's error. As he had offered his "Bible of Hell" as a supplementary canon to the Bible, Blake offers *Jerusalem* as an epic alternative to the classical model. *Jerusalem* is an epic answer to the *Iliad* as if Homer's poem had been entitled *Helen*, but Blake's *Jerusalem* is both the besieged city and the captured heroine, and his poem is an attempt to replace the legacy of Trojan Brutus with a national/poetic myth based on Jesus, whose "feet in ancient time / Walk[ed] on Englands mountains green" (*Milton* 1: 1-2, E 95).

The claim that Jesus walked in ancient England seems to be an extension of the legend that Joseph of Arimathea had visited England, preaching and bringing the Holy Grail. If Joseph, why not Jesus himself, perhaps during the unknown years of his youth? Blake engraved the plate "Joseph of Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion" while still a "beginner" (E 671), but his most obvious rewriting of English mythic history comes toward the other end of his career in the preface to chapter 2 of *Jerusalem*, addressed "To the Jews." Here Blake parodies the shocked reaction of his audience ("Can it be? Is it a Truth that the Learned have explored?") to his claim that the Jews "Ancestors derived their origin from Abraham, Heber, Shem, and Noah, who were Druids" (27, prose, E 171). By conflating Jewish and English history in this way, Blake does not simply replace Troy with Jerusalem in English mythology. Instead, he usurps priority altogether, basing history on the vision of Albion before the arrival of Brutus, glimpsed only briefly in the histories of Geoffrey or Milton. "All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore," (*Jerusalem* 46:15, E 196; 27, prose) and the beginning of history is Albion's separation of himself from Jerusalem. This separation results later in the geographic removal of Jerusalem, which had "coverd the Atlantic Mountains & the Erythrean" (24:46, E 170), from England to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, so that "wild seas & rocks close up Jerusalem away from / The Atlantic Mountains where Giants dwelt in Intellect" (49:77-50:1, E 199). Against this background, the founding of London as "Troia Nova" by Brutus can only be seen as a sign of Albion's fatal Covenant with what is called in *Milton* "the detestable gods of Priam" (14:14-15, E 108). In this context *Jerusalem's* long epic catalogues, overlaying the map of English counties with a map of the twelve tribes of Israel (16:28-60, E 160-61; 71:56-72:44, E 226-27; cf. 71:10-49, E 225-26), are an essential part of reclaiming England's true heritage. If Wordsworth wrote poems on the Naming of Places, Blake in *Jerusalem* wrote a poem on the renaming of places.

Blake's image for the spread of Albion's error is the "mighty Polypus nam'd Albion's tree" which grows on eter-

nity like "Mistletoe grows on the oak" (*Jerusalem* 66:48, 55, E 219). The polypus is a powerful visual image that Morton Paley has described as "combining the images of a sea creature, a network of associated beings, and a cancerous growth," a "symbol of cancerously proliferating Selfhood" (*Continuing City* 214, 211). Indeed, the polypus's image of the writhing branches weaving out from the central trunk unites a host of Blake's images and enemies. Not only does it suggest the branches of Albion's "deadly tree" which "spread over him its cold shadows" at the beginning of *Jerusalem* chapter 2 (28:13-19, E 174); it is also "the roots of Albions Tree [that] enterd the Soul of Los" at the beginning of chapter 3 (53:4, E 202). The image of the polypus suggests the pattern by which Blake's characters are ultimately derived from the single source of Albion: Albion divided into the four Zoas, then their emanations, then the Sons and Daughters of Albion, all branching out from the single trunk, all subdividing or reuniting in Blake's vision. It is also the shape of Aristotelian hierarchies, systems based on the abstraction of similarities by the denial of "minute particulars." Paul Miner has shown how the polypus "is associated with man's muscular fibers, the Couch of Death, the fetal web, the roots of the Tree of Mystery, and the heart, lungs, and genitals" (199). The polypus is ultimately the emblem of how one error can spread "till the Great Polypus of Generation covered the Earth" (67:34, E 220).

Like Adam, Albion/England committed a single error from which derived a world of woe. In *Jerusalem* that choice is rendered in terms of a sort of family feud—the family of Albion versus the "Divine Family"—and the feud is about whether there are really two families at all or only one. In the opening of the poem, Albion turns away from the Divine Family, rejecting Jesus as "a brother and a friend," choosing instead to believe that "By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith" (4:18, 28, E 146, 147). This denial of faith is the mathematical form that Blake associates with the Classical world, and Albion's decision is identified later in the poem with the "Covenant of Priam" (98:46, E 258). By the end of *Jerusalem*, the "Covenant of Priam" is gone and Albion has rejoined the Divine Family. He has welcomed Jerusalem back into his bosom. Troia Nova is gone, and Jerusalem has returned to Albion's ancient shores.

Indeed, one theme that unifies *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is the relationship between Albion and Priam. In *Milton a Poem*, Milton the poet is inspired by the Bard's Song to leave Eternity and return to earth in order to correct the errors perpetuated by his life and work, and especially by *Paradise Lost*. When Milton rises, his first words are "I go to Eternal Death! The Nations still / Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam" (*Milton* 14:14-15, E 108). These words suggest that Blake's critique of Milton is also a critique of the classical tradition which Milton explicitly engaged (in the invocation to Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, for example) but which in Blake's eyes, he failed to dispatch. And if Milton leaves eternity in order finally to dispatch the "Gods



of Priam," his success (in Blake's poem, at least) is apparent in the last speech on plate 98 of *Jerusalem*, when "the Cry from all the Earth" (98:54, J 258) opens with the question, "Where is the Covenant of Priam, the Moral Virtues of the Heathen" (98:46, E 258). This Covenant is no more; it has been replaced by the "Covenant of Jehovah, 'the mutual Covenant Divine' according to which all things 'Humanize / In the Forgiveness of Sins' (98:41-45, E 258). In *Jerusalem's* battle "To decide Two Worlds with a great decision: a World of Mercy, and / A World of Justice" (65:1-2, E 216), the World of Mercy, based on the myth of Jerusalem and Jesus, triumphs.

The Covenant of Jehovah constitutes the "World of Mercy," but what exactly is implied by the "Covenant of Priam," the "World of Justice"? Paley has described Priam as "the epitome of heathenism" for Blake, and he adds that the Covenant of Priam "would be the Biblical Covenant as misunderstood and misapplied by the churches" (*Commentary* 295n). But the polypus of the Covenant of Priam reaches beyond the churches; it comprises all that we have come to think of as the Adversary in Blake's universe. When Milton departs from Heaven to dispatch the Gods of Priam, his description of the circumstances emphasizes both the absence of the Savior (and all he represents) and Milton's personal culpability in the Covenant of Priam:

... The Nations still  
Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp  
Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.  
When will the Resurrection come; to deliver the sleeping  
body  
From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?  
Tarry no longer; for my soul lies at the gates of death.  
I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.  
I will go down to the sepulcher to see if the morning  
breaks!  
I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,  
Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate  
And I be seiz'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood  
The Lamb of God is seen thro' mists & shadows, hov'ring  
Over the sepulchers in clouds of Jehovah & winds of  
Elohim  
A disk of blood, distant; & heav'ns & earth's roll dark be-  
tween  
What do I here before the Judgment? without my Ema-  
nation?  
With the daughters of memory, & not the daughters of  
inspiration[?]  
I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!  
He is my Spectre!

(Milton 14[15]:14-31, E 108)

The worship of the "Gods of Priam," the Covenant of Priam, is characterized by the "Pomp of warlike Selfhood," the ideology that Barlow and others recognized in the classical epic, and also by the corruptibility of death, and the absence of the Resurrection. Milton confronts the error in

himself, and he sacrifices his own position in eternity to return to Generation to correct these errors, for he was himself a part of this covenant. Now he faces judgment, like Albion at the beginning of *Jerusalem*, without his emanation, a thrall to the same "Daughters of Memory" that Pope had invoked in his unfinished epic of *Trojan Brutus*.

At the end of *Jerusalem*, when the Covenant of Priam has been replaced by the Covenant of Jehovah, the "Cry from all the Earth from the Living creatures" indicates how far this error had enrooted itself into the world. After asking "Where is the Covenant of Priam," the "Cry" continues

... [Where are] the Moral Virtues of the Heathen  
Where is the Tree of Good & Evil that rooted beneath the  
cruel heel  
Of Albions Spectre the Patriarch Druid! where are all his  
Human Sacrifices  
For Sin in War & in the Druid Temples of the Accuser of  
Sin: beneath  
The Oak Groves of Albion that covered the whole Earth  
beneath his Spectre  
Where are the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory  
that grew on Desolation  
The Fruit of Albions Poverty Tree when the Triple Headed  
Gog-Magog Giant  
Of Albion Taxed the Nations, into Desolation & then gave  
the Spectrous Oath

(J 98:46-56, E 258)

The Covenant of Priam is gone, but its impact had been explicitly religious, moral, political and economic. The myth of the Fall, of the Tree of Good and Evil and the Accuser of Sin, and of the demands for human sacrifice—obviously including Jesus, but also including those killed in war, and those who die in poverty—are for Blake all signs of the contamination of Albion's history by Hellenic culture in the broadest sense. The result of this contamination has been the Kingdoms of the world built on Desolation, Poverty, and Taxation, and the Covenant was sealed with the Oath of the demonic Spectre. All of this, of course, was foreseen by Brutus himself at the end of *King Edward the Third*.

Replacing the Covenant of Priam is the Covenant of Jehovah:

And I heard Jehovah speak  
Terrific from his Holy Place & saw the Words of the Mu-  
tual Covenant Divine  
On Chariots of gold & jewels with Living Creatures starry  
& flaming  
With every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle  
Dove, Fly, Worm,  
And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich ar-  
ray Humanize  
In the Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of  
Jehovah

(J 98:40-45, E 258)



Through the "Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of Jehovah," even the Serpent is identified as a Human Form. Not only is "every Word & Every Character / . . . Human" (J 98:35-36, E 258) but they can even be seen riding in golden chariots. The Covenant of Jehovah seals the return of the four-fold universe, in which "every Man stood Fourfold"

Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal Death  
& Resurrection

Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah rejoicing  
in Unity

In the Four Senses in the Outline the Circumference &  
Form, for ever

In Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation. it is the  
Covenant of Jehovah.

(J 98:12, 20-23, E 257)

The change from the Covenant of Priam to the Covenant of Jehovah is a change of world view that transforms in a moment the entire landscape. In *A Vision of the Last Judgment* Blake remarks that error "is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it" (E 565). This moment is dramatized in the fifth Memorable Fancy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, when by the simple removal of the angel's "metaphysics," the vision of Leviathan "advancing . . . with all the fury of a spiritual existence" is replaced by a scene "on a pleasant bank beside a river by moon light hearing a harper who sung to the harp" (18-19, Prose, E 41-42). Similarly, in *Jerusalem*, after a long scene of divine pedagogy in which the Savior appears in the "likeness and similitude" of Albion's "friend" Los, Albion finally admits his error to the Savior and throws "himself into the Furnaces of affliction" for his friend. Here is no epic battle of champions, but a scene of self-sacrifice, and in that moment the landscape is transformed: "All was a Vision, all a Dream: the Furnaces became / Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine" (J 96:35-37, E 256). This transformation spreads and all the cities, counties, sons and daughters awaken, and the four Zoas are reassimilated into Albion's bosom. Then is Albion fully restored: "Then Albion stood before Jesus in the Clouds / Of Heaven Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity" (J 96:42-43, E 256). Thus does the Covenant of Jehovah replace the Covenant of Priam.

Like Milton, Blake understood that there were topics "more heroic than the wrath / Of stern Achilles" (PL 9:14-15). Blake apparently also came to agree with Pope that "Nature and Homer were . . . the same" (*Essay on Criticism* 135), but for Blake this is exactly the reason *not* to follow Homer. As he puts it in the Preface to *Milton*, "The stolen and perverted Writings of Homer and Ovid; of Plato & Cicero. Which all men ought to condemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible . . . . [But] We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but true to our own Imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity in which

we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord (2, prose, E 95). As Blake read him, Milton did follow Homer too closely, for Milton was not yet ready to make the move that Christopher Smart was to make almost one hundred years later when he asserted that the psalmist, shepherd king, David was "the best poet which ever lived [and] was thought worthy of the highest honour which possibly can be conceived, as the Saviour of the world was ascribed to his house, and called his son in the body" (contents, *A Song to David*). Blake may not follow David as a poetic model—he prefers the prophetic mode of Isaiah, Ezekiel, even Balaam—but he does continue Smart's project to educate and reorient English taste, because for him, there is no difference between aesthetic and political education. Put down thy *Iliad* and thy *Aeneid*, he seems to say, and pick up thy Bible.

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