

# A COMMENTARY ON:

## The Jackleg Testament

### OPERA

by Maggie Kean, Smith College '14



jack • leg: makeshift; amateur; unscrupulous



#### Jack

Nobodaddy creates Jack from a jack-in-the-box and some spare limbs. He is Eve's intended new companion and eventually woos her away from Adam.

#### Nobodaddy

God-figure inspired by a poem written by William Blake called "To Nobodaddy" (see poem on other side). Nobodaddy is a word that combines 'Nobody's Daddy.'



### MAJOR CHARACTERS

#### Serpent

Nobodaddy's cohort and subordinate. He does Nobodaddy's bidding but seems to have an agenda of his own that goes against Nobodaddy.



#### Eve

Lives in Eden with Adam, who does not speak or play a significant role in the opera. Nobodaddy is captivated by her and wants to find a more suitable companion for her than Adam.



JAY BOLOTIN  
The Jackleg Testament

June 29–September 9, 2012

AN ANIMATED OPERATIC FILM REINTERPRETING THE STORY OF ADAM AND EVE, AND THE WOODCUTS ON WHICH THE OPERA IS BASED

## INSPIRATION FOR MAIN CHARACTER

### TO NOBODADDY

Why art thou silent & invisible  
Father of jealousy  
Why dost thou hide thyself in clouds  
From every searching Eye  
Why darkness & obscurity  
In all thy words & laws  
That none dare eat the fruit but from  
The wily serpents jaws  
Or is it because Secrecy  
gains females loud applause

William Blake  
(1757–1827)

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## "Forest of the First-Named"

**Hebrew Testament:** When Adam was alone in Eden (before Eve was created), he named all the creatures. They all lived in perfect harmony without death or evil.

**Jackleg Testament:** At the opening of the opera, the creatures are killing and eating one another. We see the serpent draw a hangman on a tablet while chanting "Forgive me." He could be apologizing for what he has already done or plans to do.

## Creation of Eve

**Hebrew Testament:** God took out one of Adam's ribs while he was sleeping and used it to create a female companion for Adam.

**Jackleg Testament:** From his tower in Nobotown, Nobodaddy lays out his cards and picks out one with a symbol for a man, and one with a symbol for a woman. We then see Adam in a field in Eden, where his stomach suddenly tears open and bleeds onto the ground. A female silhouette appears out of the mist near a large tree on a hill. Nobodaddy seems pleased.

## Burning Bush

**Hebrew Testament:** Moses heard God through a burning bush. Moses was told to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, away from the tyranny of Pharaoh.

**Jackleg Testament:** Eve and Jack stop to sleep on their journey to Nobotown by a burning bush that has weeping eyes. Eve sees it as a source of light and warmth. Jack stays up during the night until the Serpent arrives and directs him to Nobotown.

**Nobodaddy's Cards** These may be Tarot cards that are used to predict the future. Nobodaddy uses the Fool card, the highest trump or wild card, more than once.

**The Artist's Daughter** The child's voice talking about the forest is that of Jay Bolotin's daughter. He recorded her telling made-up stories when she was a little girl, and decided to use this story in the opera.

## More Info

### Daniel Boone Statue

Daniel Boone was the first settler of Kentucky, where Bolotin grew up on a rural farm.

**Chorus of Bums** Similar to a Greek Chorus, they comment on the action of the story. This aspect of storytelling was developed in ancient Greek epic poems. The Chorus of Bums speak in English and French.

## In case you can't stay to watch the end of the opera:

Eve and Jack eventually make it to Nobotown, where they perform a play at the Theater of the Western Regions for Nobodaddy and his guests. The people are awed by Eve's beauty and Jack's inflammatory words about Nobodaddy. The Serpent, seeing his opportunity, incites chaos and the play ends violently. We return to Eden, from where Eve has been banished, and see Nobodaddy dismember Jack and curse the serpent. The opera ends as everything dissolves into a swirling vortex.

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