R. Paul Yoder, with a foreword by Nelson Hilton. *The Narrative Structure of William Blake's Poem* Jerusalem: *A Revisionist Interpretation*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010. v + 182 pp. 3 color illustrations. $109.95/£69.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by Molly Anne Rothenberg

WHETHER you are a first-time reader who has opened *Jerusalem* intrigued by its design and visionary promise only to close it in bafflement, or you are an expert Blake scholar, you owe it to yourself to read this book. Yoder begins by identifying a dominant trend in studies of the poem since Paley's monumental *The Continuing City*: he argues that the majority of the poem's explicators have come to the conclusion that *Jerusalem* has no overarching narrative structure. In his book, he demonstrates precisely how the poem's narrative has been neglected or trivialized and what the crucial consequences of taking the narrative into account would be.

The book has four main chapters. In his introduction and in the first chapter, Yoder reviews the evidence for the non-narrative or "synchrony" argument and traces the history of that scholarship. A large section of this chapter attends closely to De Luca's characterization of the poem as a "wall of words" that provokes the reader to experience the sublime. Yoder provides abundant counterevidence to De Luca's assertions. For example, De Luca bases his notion of the "wall of words" on the "notorious" (De Luca's term) plate 16,

> crammed as it is with sixty-nine lines of verse that run virtually from one edge of the copperplate to the other …. The text presents itself, in short, as a solid wall of words over which the eye slips, unable to find fastening. A second glance discriminates bristling ranks of capital letters, verse without syntax, nouns without predication, names without context. (De Luca, "A Wall of Words" 232, qtd. in Yoder 39)

Yoder points out, however, that this plate forms the conclusion to the five plates describing the building of Golgonooza, beginning with 12.25, and that the action of the plate is the "uniting of biblical and British geography by means of the labors of Los and his workers" (41). Granting that lines like "Levi. Middlesex Kent Surrey. Judah Somerset Glouster Wiltshire. / Dan. Cornwal Devon Dorset, Napthali, Warwick Leicester Worcester" (16.45-46) may look as though they are asyntactical, Yoder reminds us that the two preceding lines provide the context and the missing syntactical elements: "And the Forty Counties of England are thus divided in the Gates / Of Reuben Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex. Simeon Lincoln, York Lancashire". (This Blakean tactic of providing the syntax and context of difficult lines elsewhere in the poem should be familiar to any reader of "London," which gives the second-person command "HEAR" in the initial letters of the first word of each line in the third stanza to complete its syntax.) He analyzes all of the plates that might count as "walls of words," thirty in all, to argue against De Luca and then focuses on the first, plate 10, which looks even denser than plate 16, to show that the meanings of individual words—which De Luca believes to be of little importance—have extraordinary significance: this is the plate in which appears one of Blake's most famous lines, Los's statement that "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (10.20). As Yoder says, "if the poem is read as de Luca suggests, it is small wonder that it appears to have no narrative" (45).

As he makes his case for a narrative approach, Yoder fully acknowledges the impediments to discerning the narrative, but then goes on to show that those impediments are deliberate and functional. The conclusion of the first chapter makes the useful point that all texts force readers to become active to some degree. Yoder takes his cue from Richard Lanham and Julia Wright to articulate the ways in which Blake's unusually opaque style demands that readers oscillate between looking *at* the style and looking *through* the style. Yoder thinks that De Luca is so captivated by the style that he cannot see through it to the narrative it traces. By contrast, we should read both with our "Intellectual Powers" and our "Corporeal Understanding."

The second chapter begins the work of tracing the narrative itself. Criticizing De Luca's claim that the poem's sequences have "no necessary order," Yoder also argues against the prevailing opinion that the characters in the poem are simply mouthpieces for ideas rather than players in a drama or story (De Luca, *Words of Eternity* 138, qtd. in Yoder 55). The static structure posited by the adherents of synchrony leads to this mischaracterization. By analyzing scene sequences in terms of the characters who interact within them, he identifies four "basic threads" of narrative associated with a main actor: Albion, Los, the narrator, and characters from the "anterior myth" (Paley's phrase) presented in *The Four Zoas* (57). For Yoder, the most important story concerns Albion, Jerusalem, Albion's Spectre, and Vala. Although the poem begins *in medias res*, it tells the story of Albion's choice between competing discourses of divinity and the consequences of his decisions, including his fall, his paranoia, and the divisions among his children. In his narrative, Los reacts to Albion's actions as well as to his own Spectre and Emanation in order to consolidate error and to keep the Divine Vision by building Golgonooza and the Mundane Shell. The narrator's story of attempting to write the poem parallels Los's story: like Los, he feels alone and helpless as he labors to grasp and represent the consequences of Albion's disease manifested in the narrator's (and the reader's) world and time. The fourth thread tells the obscure "anterior myth" of Tharmas's murder, Luvah's trial, and Albion's seduction by Vala. Pointing out that the Saviour has access to all four threads, providing their point of unification into a single story, Yoder begins the work of interpreting the poem's portrayal of the relationship between the human and the divine.

In this chapter, Yoder does scholars a genuine service by detailing the scenes that belong to each thread and by telling the stories as they unfold within each of the poem's four chapters, explaining conflicts, errors, deceptions, and resolutions. Part of his discussion is a tour de force demonstration of the narrative order of the sequence of two four-plate blocks within plates 28-50, chapter 2, rearranged by Blake in two copies. His discussion is both revelatory for its impact on how we should understand Blake's purposes and a discrete warrant for his claims about the narrative structure of the poem. The difference that the new contexts of the rearranged plates make for the narrative requires an extensively detailed discussion, too complex for recapitulation here. Suffice it to say that I am persuaded through this explication that Yoder has truly understood the purport of the poem's form. He asks: "Why the trouble with Chapter 2? In Chapter 2 Albion's fall is not yet irrevocable. … Chapter 2 is about the possibility of saving Albion from himself. … The role of Chapter 2 in the narrative of *Jerusalem* is to hold open the moment of Albion's fall, in the possibility that it might be understood and prevented" (94-95). Agreeing with both Paley and De Luca that chapter 2 is the key to the poem, Yoder stakes his argument for the critical function of narrative, in a counter to these scholars, on this successful and fascinating demonstration.

The third chapter articulates some of the difficulties that readers encounter when trying to follow the poem's narrative threads. Referring to these difficulties as a function of Blake's "rhetoric of discontinuity," Yoder regards Blake's delay of speech attribution, his use of characters who "divide and reunite," his spatial reorientation, and the problems of knowing when a scene opens or closes as the key strategies for disrupting our expectations about narrative structure. But identifying characters, attributing speech, distinguishing the parameters of a dialogic space, and recognizing scenic shifts are fundamental readerly functions. Why, then, does Blake obscure them at some times and not at others? Yoder closely reads a large number of plates both to demonstrate the presence of an oscillation between clarity and obscurity of the narrative and to indicate how Blake is seeking actively to transform his reader to learn what Albion must learn about the unity of mankind and individuality of minute particulars.

Yoder does far more than simply repeat in other words what Blake and his many explicators have said about the variation in "Perceptive Organs" and their "Objects of Perception" or about the expansion and contraction of the senses. He actually demonstrates how this happens in specific and abundant detail. I cannot do justice to his exposition, but perhaps an extended example will indicate the usefulness of his method:

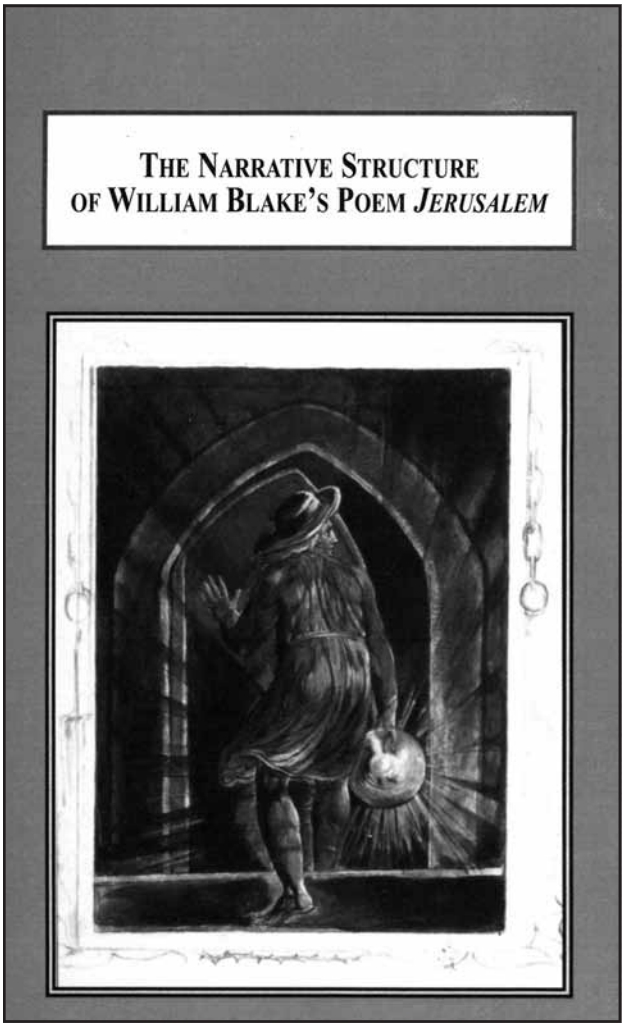
> In the first part of Chapter 3, the scene changes are often punctuated with plate shifts, while in the second part of the chapter such correspondences are repeatedly undermined. … I divided *Jerusalem*'s Chapter 3 into eight scenes; of the seven transition points between scenes, the first four occur at plate shifts (55.1, 56.1, 60.1, 63.1). However, the end of the scene that begins at 63.1 violates that pattern in a way that emphasizes the change. The scene is a long depiction of the blood orgy, and it ends with a vision of the aggregate male, Hand, and the aggregate female, Rahab, whose "Brain enlabyrinths the whole heaven of her bosom & loins" (70.29). At the bottom of plate 70, separated from the verse paragraph immediately above is the single line, "The Starry Heavens all were fled from the mighty limbs of Albion" (70.32). This line, marking the end of the plate, makes a fitting end to the violence of the blood orgy and the eerie calm of the closing vision of the aggregate male and female. But when plate 71 opens, "And above Albions Land was seen the Heavenly Canaan" (71.1), that closing line must be reread as the opening line of the spatial reorientation that introduces the "exploration of states." This use of the single opening line to straddle the change of plates is mirrored later when the final line of the exploration scene appears as the first line of text on plate 73. The very minuteness of the violation of the expected pattern—the use of a single line to create a tension between the expected reading and the necessary rereading—emphasizes the danger of passive reading …. Instead, lines of continuity overlay points of demarcation, creating a narrative characterized by bright spots of drama that expand and contract according to the reader's perceptions. (122-23)

This level of detail is a hallmark of Yoder's discussion, and even though this is a short book, it has ample close readings, each of which not only makes Yoder's larger point about the narrative structure of the poem but also adds to the reader's appreciation of the poem's artistry and philosophy. In this chapter, Yoder is concerned to help the reader understand why narrative is critical to Blake's purposes, for without the impulse to follow the narrative (an impulse blocked by the synchronic approach), the reader will not have a reason to engage in the recalibrations of identity, spatiality, and organization that form the very intellectual exercise the poem is designed to foster. Narrative is necessary to change the reader's mind.

The final chapter takes up the more daunting challenge of articulating the poem's staging of "the conflict between the competing claims of divine authority that drive the plot of *Jerusalem*" (125). Arguing against some scholars (my younger self included) who despair of finding a textual basis for choosing between the Saviour's and the Spectre's claims to divinity—because the claims mirror each other and because both are predicated on rhetorical constructions of authority—Yoder advances the plausible notion that Blake does give the reader grounds for making a decision, even in the face of such uncertainty: "The basis for deciding between the divine discourse of the Saviour and that of the Spectre lies in the difference between their responses to the problem of sin, and in *Jerusalem* the Saviour offers a system of forgiveness so radical that it shocks even Los and the poem's narrator" (126). This chapter is a virtuoso synthesis of Blake's corpus and its attendant scholarship as well as a sensitive reading of the poem to

support that claim. It should be read for its clear explanation of the core of *Jerusalem* and its compelling demonstration of the reasons why Blake shaped his poem the way that he did.

The book has some weaknesses: for experienced Blake scholars, the long reprise of the "synchronic" school may be tedious and even argumentative, even though Yoder is at pains to delineate critical differences (which may make it particularly useful for students). The third chapter could benefit from more examples of extended readings. In citing parts of the text that exemplify one or another point, he doesn't offer expanded interpretations. But these are minor complaints in the context of the very important work that this book represents. After my first reading, I wished that Yoder had gone on to write a comprehensive explication of the poem in sequence and in detail, as Donald Ault has done for *The Four Zoas* in *Narrative Unbound*. But on a second reading, I was well satisfied that Yoder's explanation of the poem's unique enterprise, special techniques, and inspiring philosophy offers an indispensable introduction to *Jerusalem*.



James Rovira. *Blake and Kierkegaard: Creation and Anxiety*. London: Continuum, 2010. x + 184 pp. £60.00/$110.00, hardcover; £24.99/$44.95, paperback (2011).

Reviewed by Kathryn Freeman

IN *Blake and Kierkegaard: Creation and Anxiety*, James Rovira explores historical synchronicities to mine the potential for like-mindedness between Blake and Kierkegaard. He introduces a compelling rationale for bringing the two writers together: "Neither author is concerned with history as such but rather with the phenomenological profile that historical forces hold for the individual subject" (3). This distinction between "history as such" and the subject's intersection with history as a "phenomenological" experience is an improvement over previous studies of these writers that separate history and subjectivity.

Just as this synthesis of history and subjectivity offers a rethinking of Blake and of Kierkegaard, Rovira's revision of Derridean deconstruction from the hindsight of new historicism challenges the assumption of mutual exclusion between the two theoretical positions. More relevant for the study itself, this strategy has the potential to prevent the argument from being limited to mere synchronicity. Yet it is more persuasive regarding Kierkegaard than for Blake: Rovira negotiates the atemporality of deconstruction via the observation that "Kierkegaardian anxiety is not a textual movement but an emotional one, an individual experience registered in literature but embedded within historical, cultural, social, and personal particularities," which provides the basis for the study's focus on Kierkegaard's "understand[ing] individuality to exist in a continual dialectic with history and society" (4). Attributing the same impulse to Blake's texts is less convincing, however. Applying deconstruction, even in tandem with new historicism, in reading Blake's texts or designs is problematic for reasons Paul de Man first articulated: Blake's "privileging of writing" makes it "less resistant" to deconstruction, a remark that seems truer to the more complex erasures and re-creations in Blake's cosmology; incorporating the historical dimension does not resolve but rather evades this fundamental problem.[1]

The potential for reductiveness is a danger for any comparison between writers, but it is more so between a philosopher and a writer-artist as multifaceted as Blake. By premising the argument on the assumption that "their works are a record

1. The quotation is from an interview with W. J. T. Mitchell in his essay "Visible Language: Blake's Wond'rous Art of Writing," *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Morris Eaves and Michael Fischer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 91.