

Book Reviews

Bessai, Dianne and David Jackel eds. *Figures In A Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected In Honour of Sheila Watson*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978. \$13.00, \$6.25 pb.

New, William H. ed. *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978.

1978 will remain a significant year for Canadian letters, for in it were published two *festschriften* substantial in volume, scope, contributors and quality, and dedicated to two lettered Canadians whose respective contributions to the culture of our country command immense respect, whose varied participation in the growth and development of our literary culture especially has furthered significantly its maturity, and whose stature has stimulated these two tributes which are themselves additional proofs and signposts of that maturity. Both volumes, to the credit of editors and contributors alike, reflect and compliment their respective mentors, Sheila Watson and George Woodcock, and Canadian letters.

In particulars, the two volumes are quite different, since Woodcock and Watson are quite different, in personality, in aesthetic interests, and in experience (though not, I hasten to add, in devotion to literature). Sheila Watson was born in Canada, raised and educated here, and has lived her entire life here, but has throughout her life explored her intense interest in a modern literature restrained and contained by no national boundaries. It is fitting, then, that *Figures In A Ground* should include pieces on such Canadians as Hébert, Munro, Marlatt, Sinclair Ross, Kroetsch, and Richardson, scattered among pieces (mostly by Canadians) on Garcia Marquez, Nabokov, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Senghor, Achebe, and Soyinka; fitting, too, that an essay on Canadian little magazines and small presses should be accompanied by an essay on the Imagists. It is appropriate that George Woodcock's more cosmopolitan life (Canadian birth, British upbringing and education) be reflected in a similar mixture of works of Canadian and non-Canadian character (an essay on Eliot accompanying one on Klein; poems by George Bowering, Tom Wayman, Tom Marshall, Al Purdy, Seymour Mayne accompanying others by Denise Levertov, Kathleen Raine, Roy Fuller). It is also appropriate that Woodcock's range of international interests be evinced by the international range of contributors, with such as Robert B. Heilman, Balachandra Rajan, Naim Kattan, Julian Symons and Mulik Raj Anand joining the already mentioned Levertov, Raine, and Fuller.

It may seem initially ironic that, while Sheila Watson's most obvious contribution to Canadian letters has been her novel *The*

Double Hook, there are no original works of fiction or poetry included within *Figures In A Ground*. Clearly, however, the editors have recognized that Mrs. Watson's fictive achievements require no confirmation, and have just as clearly devoted this volume to proclaiming her salutary, inspiring contribution to Canada's critical thinking, through her interaction with friends, students and admirers, within which lists are contained such names as Henry Kreisel, Philip Stratford, Michael Ondaatje, Marshall McLuhan, Fred Cogswell, Rudy Wiebe, Eli Mandel, Norman Yates, and others. This emphasis upon the essentially personal impact of Sheila Watson serves to lighten the potentially oppressive, critical impersonality of a volume containing such titles as "Rhetorical Spirals in *Four Quartets*," "Xenophilometropolitania: The reluctant modernism of the Imagists," or "The Wacousta Factor." It also provides a vitalizing thread of unity to a collection otherwise necessarily heterogeneous, a thread of unity more meaningful than the vaguely general "total effect" of "unity in multiplicity . . . in the common devotion to the twentieth-century creative imagination both within and beyond physical boundaries," to which the editors have laid claim. One finds more accurate, even if sentimental, Henry Kreisel's encomium that "wherever Sheila Watson has gone in Canada, wherever the *there* was, and however inhospitable it might have seemed, she has created a space and made a garden."

A similarly personal note pervades *A Political Art*, not merely in the personal reminiscences of George Woodcock offered by Donald Stephens, Julian Symons, or Mulk Raj Anand, in Jack Ludwig's personal essay, nor in the poetic tributes to Woodcock by Wayman, Purdy, Raine or Fuller. The personal note rings out more significantly in the close alliance of art and politics, which the title of this volume aptly bespeaks, and which George Woodcock's life and writing has consistently, persistently proclaimed. There are essays here on the social aesthetic of architecture (Arthur Erickson), on "Anarchism" (D. S. Savage), "Culture et Pouvoir" (Naim Kattan), "The Writer and Off-Beat Politics" (Colin Ward), "Theatre, Self, and Society" (Robert B. Heilman), "The Caricaturist As Social Critic" (Ramsay Cook), "The Conscience of Art" (M. W. Steinberg); they all support Woodcock's sense of the social significance of art, even though they do not all concur with his devotion to the general principles of anarchism.

The offerings of *Figures In A Ground* and *A Political Art*, while generally interesting, soundly reasoned, and well-written, are not unremittingly excellent, as the unfortunate pastiche by John Robert Colombo in the latter reveals. Neither would one claim that either volume affords seminal critical insights destined to alter radically contemporary critical wisdom or practice. Much as such pristine achievement would celebrate magnificently two as worthy of celebration as Watson and Woodcock, it is not to be expected from the occasional and heterogeneous collections which *festschriften* inevitably are. It is something that these volumes reflect accurately and honourably the personalities, interests, and achievements of the individuals they honour, and

that they render tribute feelingly, as in Kreisels "Sheila Watson in Edmonton," and with quiet, finely-etched grace, as in Kathleen Raine's "For George Woodcock, With Kind Remembrances:"

Bright cloud,
 Bringer of rain to far fields,
 To me, who will not drink that waterfall nor feel
 Wet mist on my face,
 White gold and rose
 Vision of light,
 Meaning and beauty immeasurable:
 That meaning is not rain, nor that beauty mist.

Charles R. Steele

Marvin Rosenberg. *The Masks of "Macbeth"*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978. pp. 802. \$27.50.

Each of us has played Lord Hamlet on occasion, but who would leap to embrace the hero's role if the play were, let us say, *The Tragedy of Claudius, King of Denmark*? Trying to imagine such a play — and such a hero — reminds us that, of all the tragedy we know, the tragedy of ambition makes perhaps the greatest demands upon its author — and its audience. One of the most obvious difficulties with such a play is the winning of our deep sympathies for the protagonist. Consider Tamburlaine, for example; he is made sympathetic, even admirable, without being made very interesting. With Tamburlaine, Marlowe learns that, if a tragedy of ambition is to be truly successful, it must concentrate its energies upon rendering the character of the hero. This involves new difficulties; in the hands of a master, that character will become necessarily complex, sometimes dangerously so. (Note how perilously close Marlowe's Barabas sails to farce, and also how his Mortimer touches us as Tamburlaine and Edward II never do.) A protagonist who kills for advantage must needs be complex indeed before he can quicken our sense of identity with him, to say nothing of our pity and our fear. And such complexity makes heavy demands upon reader and actor and audience, demands which we are not always ready to meet. So we "clarify" a text, in the interests of morality, integrity, purity, or perhaps in accordance with some inspired notion of the playwright's intention. *Macbeth*, as the greatest tragedy of ambition in our language, has long been an obvious subject for such simplification. If Marvin Rosenberg's *The Masks of Macbeth* did nothing more than convince us of this by collecting and commenting upon details of major productions of the play during the last three and a half centuries, Mr. Rosenberg would have made his debtors all those who love the last of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

That the book does much more than so collect and comment will not surprise those familiar with Mr. Rosenberg's earlier works, *The Masks of "Othello"* (1961; sub-titled "The Search for

the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics") and *The Masks of "King Lear"* (1972). Like its predecessors, this book presents the fruits of thorough and painstaking research with sensitivity and insight. Like "*Lear*", the book deals with the play scene by scene; 682 pages of text are fully supplemented by notes, bibliography, index, and a forty-four page "Theatre Bibliography," this last assembling much valuable information pertaining to specific productions. Since Mr. Rosenberg's exploration of the play is most illuminatingly coupled with a history of productions, his is one of those rare books equally to be prized by reader, critic, and actor. The interpretations of illustrious actors and actresses — Garrick, Kean, Booth, Siddons, the Kembles, Olivier and Burbage, to name only a few — are discussed in detail. The author shows how conceptions of decorum have influenced noteworthy productions of the past, sometimes altering Shakespeare's creation drastically. (Eighteenth-century productions routinely omitted the slaughter of Macduff's family; Garrick's *Macbeth* died the beautiful death of a penitent Christian in fine voice.) To the selected aberrations and insights of the past, culled from an extensive examination of diaries, memoirs, annotated working scripts, and contemporary accounts, Mr. Rosenberg brings his considerable sensitivity as a critic in his attempt to explore what he terms Shakespeare's "polyphonic design."

Such exploration demands what the author calls "a devotion to honest seeing" — there are worse definitions of criticism — and a willingness to submit oneself to the full ambiguity of the play. Designedly, "the play abjures answers," and we should not rush to supply them if this demands that we impose upon the play and its characters "the crippling confines of a limited identity." Mr. Rosenberg seeks to deliver *Macbeth* from that reductive criticism which, no matter what its length, ends by exhausting its reader long before exhausting its subject. Hence his interest in the relationship between text and production — what have great actors and directors made of *Macbeth*? In his treatment of Shakespeare's design . . . is to enter it as an actor might, fitting the garment not to a pattern, but to the dramatic identity formed by the role's given qualities, actions, and relationships." Mr. Rosenberg's performance in this book amply demonstrates the soundness of such an approach.

While it is true that the play may happily abjure answers, the critic must nonetheless occasionally commit himself. And Mr. Rosenberg has many fine suggestions to make. Sometimes his argument hangs incomplete; he rightly calls attention to Shakespeare's linking of our sexual and violent impulses in *Macbeth*, and might have pursued this connection more tenaciously, since it seems the key to much of the play's power. Occasionally one must question his premises; he is so intent on establishing the ambiguity of the Weird Sisters, for example, that he minimises the popular conception of witchcraft in Jacobean Britain. But his attempt to see the play entire, to glimpse the characters in all their complexity, is always praiseworthy. His

work is particularly useful and rich in its exploration, not only of Macbeth, but also of Banquo, Duncan, Lady Macbeth, and Malcolm. While it cannot avoid the vexed question of Macbeth's offspring, his speculation on the importance of dynastic succession in the play does much to illuminate its central themes and symbols. And our feelings for the wonderful and irreducible complexity of the play grows as we read. Finally, "we go with Macbeth" says Mr. Rosenberg, because, despite the murders on his hands, "our polyphony responds to his." Shakespeare's *coup de maître* in this play is to command both this polyphony and this response; Mr. Rosenberg's is to help less gifted and less diligent readers open themselves to everything the play offers.

One final word: this is certainly a book to be chewed and digested, but Mr. Rosenberg offers us a banquet, not a Businessman's Lunch. About certain things we could wish to hear more (one reference to John Wilkes Booth in the role of Macbeth is unfair); about certain others we could bear to hear a little less (some readers may not altogether relish the thirty-two page discussion of the stage direction "Enter three Witches"). But *The Masks of "Macbeth"* is written with unfailing humour and deftness, and with unfeigned admiration both for the play and for all those who have struggled with it. Reading these pages, we cannot doubt that, whatever his own struggles, Mr. Rosenberg has listened long and thoughtfully to the music of *Macbeth*; now, thanks to the labour he so evidently delights in, all of us may hear that music the more clearly.

William Blackburn

W. Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson*. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1977, pp. 646. \$19.95.

The author of yet another biography of Samuel Johnson has to be, of necessity, a courageous spirit. He will be uncomfortably aware, as a close student of the Johnsonian biographical tradition, that there have been, between William Rider's first attempt in 1762 and the present day, over two hundred biographical accounts of Lichfield's most famous citizen, and that nearly all of these biographies are forgotten except by a handful of Johnson specialists. He must surely ask himself the question whether his own work might well prove to be equally ephemeral. Any current biographer, and his publisher, will also be very conscious of the fact that two admirable general biographies of Johnson, from the talented pens of John Wain and Margaret Lane, were produced in 1975 and are still on the market. In attempting to justify the publication of yet another, it might be argued that it is a tribute to Johnson's greatness as a man and as a writer that each succeeding generation finds Johnson vital enough to relate what he was, what he said and what he wrote to that generation's predominant cultural interests and concerns. The irony is that it is not Johnson the moralist, or Johnson *Agonistes* who remains alive and well, but the all-powerful myth of Johnson, the great bear-like eccentric. There is little evidence, alas, that Johnson's own writings will ever be as widely read as Bate's

biography. I am also doubtful whether Bate's compelling literary portrait of the near heroic struggles of Johnson against poverty, psychosomatic illness and all other ills which assail the scholar's life will ever seriously modify that overwhelming impression of the Boswellian portrait of a great original dominating the conversations and opinions of all the lesser mortals who flocked to see and hear him. The greatest challenge facing any new biographer of Johnson is how effectively does his work rebut the assertion that, as long as Boswell's *Life* exists, further biographies can offer nothing more than supplementary material or a new and striking emphasis.

Walter Jackson Bate has less reason to fear a lukewarm reception than most biographers of Johnson. His qualifications for writing a new popular biography of Johnson are as impeccable as they are various. He has already demonstrated his skill in the genre with his studies of Keats (1963) and of Coleridge (1968). He does not have to apologize, as John Wain over-modestly does, for not being a Johnson specialist. Bate's critical study, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*, is deservedly popular amongst students and teachers. This new biography is a work aimed at the non-specialist and the general reader. In such biographies it is the biographer's task, to use Bate's own words, "to select and distill as honestly as he can". This particular popular biography, however, arises out of scholarly excellence, as Bate's editorial work on the Yale *Johnson* abundantly demonstrates. Bate also reveals that deep basic sympathy or love for his subject which is so necessary for successful biographical writing, and he never crosses that dangerous line which separates loving sympathy from idolatry, and biography from panegyric. Johnson might well have been startled by some of Bate's observations on his intimate relationships with Tetty, but he would surely have approved of Bate's balanced mixture of sympathy and objectivity. When Malone suggested to Johnson that Joseph Addison's character was so generally admirable that it was a pity that Johnson's account of him should have mentioned some minor flaws, Johnson insisted that a man's vices, as well as his virtues, should be treated in his biography. As Bate says, Johnson believed "that hardly a single life has passed from which we could not learn something, if only it were told with complete honesty". Johnson's life, whether we read of it in his own letters, or in Boswell's masterpiece, or in Wain or Bate, or in all of these places, is compellingly instructive.

The major virtues of Bate's solidly satisfying life cannot be easily summarized in a short review. I was particularly pleased to find that it is largely free from the tiresome polemical tone which has disfigured some other recent work on Johnson. It is a pleasure to read a biography of Johnson which establishes its own perspectives without attempting to demean or diminish the achievement of earlier biographers and critics. It is not necessary to indulge in anti-Boswell sentiments in order to be a good Johnsonian. Bate's attitude towards, and use of, Boswell, strikes me as being very sensible. He amplifies Boswell's account of Johnson's early life with the aid of the assiduous researches of

Reade and Clifford, and extensively uses Boswell's treasury of materials for those parts of Johnson's life for which Boswell is the main source. He tactfully enlarges Boswell's picture of Johnson's later days by drawing on our extensive 20th century knowledge of the Thrales. Bate mentions the interesting fact that, in the twenty-one years Boswell knew Johnson, he spent only 426 days in Johnson's company. This is, of course, exactly 426 days *more* than any 20th century biographer can claim, and Bate is well aware that Boswell, with his notebooks, had a marvellous facility for recreating living personalities. Bate rightly calls Boswell's *Life* "a masterpiece of world literature," and avoids the curious excesses of Donald Greene, who, in an article recently published in *The Georgia Review*, falls miserably to convince me that Boswell's *Life* is "in 1978 a most inadequate biography of Samuel Johnson." Greene sets Boswell up against mythical ideals of biography and uses all kinds of special pleading. Bate's biography is mercifully free from this kind of thing.

Bate makes extensive use of Freudian and post-Freudian concepts and terminology in analyzing some of Johnson's inner conflicts. He does so with characteristic good sense and restraint, and works largely within the limits of the evidence provided by Johnson's prayers, meditations and letters, and by the testimony of Johnson's most intimate friends. One wonders occasionally what Johnson himself, and his friends in holy orders, who naturally saw Johnson's psychological problems in terms of religious and moral imperatives, would have made of the "super-ego" explanations which Bate provides for the rigorous demands which Johnson made on himself and which caused the subsequent breakdowns. Bate very briefly dismisses conjectures that some of Johnson's personality disorders may have had physiological or organic origins, strongly preferring the explanation that Johnson's "tics" and compulsive mannerisms were psychoneurotic symptoms. With Johnson's continuous history of ill-health, it is surely not unreasonable to believe that such painful afflictions were both physical *and* psychosomatic in origin. Had they been purely psychosomatic, a man of Johnson's strength of character might well have been able to overcome them. Generally speaking, however, Bate's psychological explanations of Johnson's inner torments and outward infirmities show a balance and restraint frequently absent from discussions of this kind.

One of the most difficult issues for a twentieth century biographer of Johnson is how much weight he should give to the "padlock and fetters" business in view of the problematic and incomplete nature of the evidence. Bate's assertion that a sexual explanation of Johnson's padlock and of the cryptic note in the *Diaries*: "De pedicis et manicis insana cogitatio" flies in the face of psychological probability and practical good sense, is persuasive, as is his argument that twentieth century minds are too prone to assume sexual abnormality in everything described as "secret". He believes that Johnson's "secret" was his belief that he had actually been insane during his breakdowns and kept padlock and fetters — the normal means of restraint for the insane in the eighteenth century — by him as a precautionary

measure. There is certainly no hard evidence that the relationship between Johnson and Mrs. Thrale had sado-masochistic overtones. Bate might have been wiser to use the old Scottish legal verdict of "not proven" rather than his emphatic verdict of "not guilty" in view of the puzzling tone of a later exchange of letters between Mrs. Thrale and her house guest.

One result of Bate paying so much attention to Johnson's tormented "inner life" is that insufficient attention is paid to Johnson in the metropolitan and public context of the tavern, salon and the streets of London, where Johnson's lively humour and wit were so noticeable. Boswell, of course, does this supremely well, and Bate may have felt that it need not be repeated.

I have said nothing so far of the numerous critical analyses of Johnson's writings which are of the greatest importance in a biography of a literary figure. It is not because I undervalue them, and I am at a loss to understand the harshness of the criticism of some early reviewers about this aspect of Bate's work, making as they do, such judgements as "weak", "conventional" and "perfunctory". The literary analyses seem to me to exemplify both Bate's sound critical positions and the maturity of his critical insights. They are written in that deceptively simple, graceful, jargon-free prose with which his students and readers have long been familiar. Bate's views on *Rasselas*, the *Rambler* essays and the poetical imitations are already well known, and it may be that they lose a little from this familiarity, and from the compression consequent on the subordination of the study of the works to the interpretation of the man necessary in a biography. They remain, however, an important and insightful part of a splendid biography which will remain permanently on my shelves alongside Boswell, Krutch and Wain.

R. H. Carnie

W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978. pp. xix + 232, illus. \$16.50.

Mitchell's book is on the whole an excellent study of the relationship between text and design in Blake's illuminated poetry. The first two chapters cover very helpful background examining Blake's theory and art in the context of various aesthetic traditions. Having established the background and principles of Blake's unique composite art, Mitchell turns in the last three chapters to practical critiques of *The Book of Thel*, *The Book of Urizen* and *Jerusalem*.

Mitchell argues that what makes Blake's poetry and illustrations distinctive is that each stands on its own and that the two forms, while complete in themselves, join and conflict to create a composite art. Although neither of the forms is subordinate to the other, Blake achieves a unity which is not simple "painting plus poetry," but "painting times poetry," a complex "dialectic between vigorously independent modes of expression." This dia-

lectic between text and design reflects Blake's theory that "without Contraries is no Progression." Mitchell's point that the form of Blake's art reflects his vision is well-taken and he frequently comes up with perceptive readings based on the principle that various aspects of Blake's "execution" or style are metaphors in themselves. For example, he argues that in *The Book of Urizen* the separation of text and design, the two-column format of the pages, and the division of the text with chapter and verse numbers reflect Urizen's mania for dividing and measuring.

Another area in which Mitchell is particularly effective is explaining the reason for Blake's creation of a dynamic relationship between text and design: "the contrariety of poem and picture entices the reader to supply the missing connections. In this light, the problematics of reading text and design serve as an 'allegory address'd to the Intellectual powers' which is 'fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act.'" Blake's composite art demands a creative partner and Mitchell argues convincingly that he designed "pictures as vortices which draw the reader inward, into a dialectic of ironies, ambiguities, paradoxes, and concentric unfoldings," and that he "intentionally designed *Jerusalem* to allow only an approximate sense of structural orientation" in order to draw "our attention inward, onto the Minute Particulars of text and design." In light of this his reading of the frontispiece to *Jerusalem* is particularly apt — the figure entering the dark doorway with the burning sun-imagination in his right hand symbolizes "with equal force the activities of the author, hero, or reader of the poem. To assert that the figure is 'primarily' to be seen as Los is simply to restate this universality of reference, for Los symbolizes the imagination of *both* the author and the reader, personified as the hero of the poem."

Mitchell's choice of *The Book of Thel*, *The Book of Urizen* and *Jerusalem* is appropriate (covering as they do a wide variety of Blake's poetic and visual styles and themes) giving his study a rising crescendo from the apparent pastoral simplicity of *Thel*, through the more complex mythic parody of *Urizen* to what Mitchell describes as the "encyclopedic anatomy" of *Jerusalem*. In spite of this chronological arrangement Mitchell does not fall into the trap of dividing Blake's artistic life into periods or stages (cf. E. D. Hirsch's attempt to stuff Blake's work into a grid of menopausal periods in *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake*). In fact, Mitchell's treatment of these three works, covering approximately thirty years of Blake's life, implicitly illustrates how organic Blake's vision was. Unlike Wordsworth or Byron, Blake did not undergo any great retractions or reversals for, to use Mitchell's term, Blake's vision is "centripetal" rather than linear and it never hardened into a fixed teleology or philosophy. Mitchell at one point apologizes for referring to Blake's concept of "Self-annihilation" in discussing *The Book of Thel* because this theory is not developed until *Milton* fifteen years later. But this concept, though not articulated as completely as in the later works, was certainly an important part of Blake's vision in 1789 and Mitchell's use of it in reading *Thel*

is pertinent. In the last chapter Mitchell indicates the kind of organic growth Blake's vision underwent when he points out Blake's emphasis on "Mental Studies" towards the end of *Jerusalem*. Though Blake advocates "the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination,"

his chief interest has clearly shifted to imagination as an "Intellectual Fountain," with the "lineaments of Gratified desire" and the "improvement of sensual enjoyment" placed in a subordinate position (but not abandoned). The horses of instruction are evidently gaining on the tygers of wrath in the race to the palace of wisdom.

I wish that Mitchell had more often risked the tone exemplified in the above passage. His style is for the most part clear and accurate and, when at its best, transcends academic stiffness as in the following passage where he describes *Jerusalem* as an anatomy:

But the genre of anatomy shares characteristics other than an apparent formlessness with *Jerusalem* — the intellectual, philosophical emphasis, the deliberate disregard for mimetic form, the exhaustive scope, the dialectical procedure, and the insistence on an insomniac for its ideal reader. It is clearly unlike some anatomies in its lack of overt humor and in its tendency to refer to a presiding comic or apocalyptic resolution rather than a state of ironic irresolution. The typical anatomy is a losing race against death and corruption: Donne worries that the world will decay too rapidly for him to finish his analysis and Sterne knows that his humor cannot outrace death forever. For Blake the only important death is the "Eternal Death" of a stifled, unproductive life, immersed in the nightmare of history. The race with this kind of death can be won at any moment, for "whenever an Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual."

At times, however, Mitchell indulges in academic jargon ("complex matrices of intersubjectivity", "contrarious interaction" "multiplicative rather than an additive relationship") which obfuscates rather than clarifies his points.

One of his forgivable faults is the tendency at times to over-read illustrations. His treatment of some of the plates pushes past the more obvious meanings only to evaporate Blake's contraries into neuters resulting in oxymoronic chaos. He is quite right that Blake does not deal in "good" and "evil" absolutes but his argument that Urizen is "like the fool who persists in his folly till he becomes wise" and his attempts to point out Urizen's "heroic folly" in the illustrations to *The Book of Urizen* are not convincing. But more often than not Mitchell gives us perceptive readings solidly grounded on what can be seen in the designs. He is aware that Blake did not "mean" every stroke in the designs and that there is a difference between imaginatively seeing a world in a minute particular and attempting to literally

identify and explain the minute particulars in the illustrations. As Mitchell puts it,

It may well be impossible to "approve" every word and image in *Jerusalem*, not just in the sense of commending its truth or beauty but in the more fundamental sense of "proving" or demonstrating the meaning of every particular in a practical way. Blake asks us . . . to read in a spirit of faith and forgiveness as well as demonstration.

But I do not wish to quibble over stylistic slips and the folly of over-reading. What is important is that Mitchell's imaginative persistence frequently leads to wise and illuminating insights. The shape of his book also speaks to us for it, like *Jerusalem*, is linear on the surface but intrinsically "centripetal". He concludes with "A Conclusion in which Nothing is Concluded" but far from leaving us with nothing *Blake's Composite Art* supplies Blake enthusiasts with numerous arrows of winged thought for continuing mental warfare.

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O. S. Mitchell

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