



Blake's 'Jerusalem' As Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body (Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs)

Susanne M. Sklar

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Before etching *Jerusalem* William Blake wrote about creating 'the grandest poem that this world contains.' Blake's avowed intention in constructing the work was to move readers from a solely rational way of being (called Ulro) to one that is highly imaginative (called Eden/Eternity), with each word chosen to suit 'the mouth of a true Orator.' Rational interpretation is of limited use when reading this multifaceted epic and its non-linear structure presents a perennial challenge for readers.

Susanne Sklar engages with the interpretive challenges of *Jerusalem* by considering it as a piece of visionary theatre --an imaginative performance in which characters, settings, and imagery are not confined by mundane space and time-- allowing readers to find coherence within its complexities. With his characters, Blake's readers can participate imaginatively in what Blake calls 'the Divine Body, the Saviour's Kingdom,' a way of being in which all things interconnect: spiritually, ecologically, socially, and erotically.

Imaginatively engaging with *Jerusalem* involves close textual reading and analysis. The first part of this book discusses the notion of visionary theatre, and the theological, literary, and historical antecedents of *Jerusalem's* imagery, characters, and settings. Particular attention is paid to the theological context of Blake's Jesus ('the Divine Body'), and Jerusalem, the heroine of his poem. This prepares the ground for a scene-by-scene commentary of the entire illuminated work. *Jerusalem* tells the story of Albion's fall, many rescue attempts, escalating violence and oppression, and a surprising apocalypse --in which all living things, awakening, are transfigured in ferocious forgiveness.

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