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R E V I E W

David V. Erdman, ed., et al., *A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake*

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REVIEW

A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake, ed. by David V. Erdman, with the assistance of John E. Thiesmeyer and Richard J. Wolfe; also G.E. Bentley, Jr., Palmer Brown, Robert F. Gleckner, George Mills Harper, Karl Kiralis, Martin K. Nurmi, and Paul M. Zall. Cornell University Press, 2 vols., 2317 pp., \$25.00.

A concordance is something we take for granted, as our students do "The Dictionary." Yet up to now, we have lived without a Blake concordance. The closest things to it has been the index volume of Sloss and Wallis' Prophetic Writings, useful at times but having no claim to completeness and inadequate to the needs of contemporary Blake scholarship. A modern Concordance has at last been published, with implications for the study of Blake that we can only begin to glimpse now.

First, a few facts. The Concordance is one of those produced at Cornell under the general editorship of S.M. Parrish. These are computer-made concordances, with the entries printed as reduced-size IBM printout. In order to produce a text for keypunching, it was virtually necessary to re-edit Blake, and as a result Mr. Erdman's edition of The Poetry and Prose was produced. The Concordance, however is keyed to the pagination and line numbering of the Keynes editions of 1957 and 1966. In addition to the concordance proper, there are 72 pages of corrections and additions to the Keynes text, and there is a 62-page grouped-frequency word list. A short preface by Mr. Erdman includes some suggestions as to the significance of the Concordance for future scholarship.

One of the immediate applications of the Concordance will no doubt be to the study of Blake's vocabulary and its development. One is struck, for example, by the startling growth of Blake's "technical" language. Spectre, for example, appears only twice before The Four Zoas, 179 times in and after it (not counting possessives and plurals). Selfhood does not occur before Milton. Imagination is used 29 times in verse and, interestingly, 57 times in prose; only one of these comes before the letter to Dr. Trusler in 1799. Jerusalem, with a surprising 222 verse occurrences, is found only three times before The Four Zoas. Blake's most frequent noun² turns out to be neither day (225 occurrences, the same as Enitharmon) nor night (356) but Los (512)! However, Albion and Albion's have a sum total of 669 verse occurrences.

The Concordance is full of implications for Blakean chronology. A suggestion made in the editor's preface, that "Vocabulary changes . . . would appear to support the hypothesis that Night VII was written later than VIIb," deserves to be pursued, for a start. Another suggestive area of study is the relationship of Blake's vocabulary to that of his contemporaries, a subject on which nothing seems to have been done since Josephine Miles' Eras and Modes in English Poetry. Many other values of the Concordance have, I suspect, yet to occur to us. As Professor Miles remarked in her review of the first two Cornell concordances, "The future opens many more possible lines of inquiry about poetry, because the speed and accuracy of complex tabulations will prepare for the asking of new questions in the giving of more and more new answers."³

--MDP

¹Considering the existing problems of chronology, one must of course use "before" and "after" advisedly.

²The most frequent word, after exclusions, in all (1007) is its several grammatical functions.

³Victorian Studies, VIII (1965), 292.