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Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr., ed., *The Romantics on Milton*

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Reviews

Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. *The Romantics on Milton: Formal Essays and Critical Asides* [Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Landor, Hazlitt, Hunt, DeQuincey, Byron, Shelley, and Keats]. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970. Pp. 594. \$15.00

Reviewed by Andy P. Antippas

Miltonists, Romanticists, and historians of criticism must be grateful for the material plentifully garnered by Mr. Wittreich. He has harvested the references and allusions to Milton from the essays, journals, diaries, notebooks, marginalia, letters, reported conversations, and poems of the major writers of the Romantic period, and he has thus provided us with a *vade mecum* into the hearts and minds of those most perspicacious readers, and, not surprisingly, with a considerable amount of excellent reading.

Wittreich does not pretend to offer complete bibliographical apparatus, but, nonetheless, the cross-referenced notes at the end of every chapter contain everything of importance concerning the influence of Milton on the Romantics. The slighter remarks of Lamb, Landor, Hazlitt, Hunt, and DeQuincey and a brief description of Coleridge's lectures are listed in two appendices. The Coleridge section will no doubt be expanded when a new edition of this volume is called for and new material is made generally available. An additional appendix will serve to list any oversights such as the Milton references in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. de Selincourt, I, 35; DeQuincey, *Collected Writings*, ed. Masson, V, 211; and *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Rollins, I, 397.

Wittreich intelligently surmounts the dangers of Bartlettizing and avoids the atomism and gnomonic isolation of remarks by constantly quoting a sufficient amount of material to preserve the coherence and the context of each observation. This generous sampling itself assists in making the case Wittreich presents in his valuable introductory essay: namely, that the Romantics "are the unacknowledged architects of Milton criticism as we know it today" (p. ix), and that somehow, the pro-Miltonists and con were a party to either ignoring the issues raised by the Romantic critics or imperfectly labeling Romantic commentary as

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1 & 2 Two sketches, recto and verso, of "Isaiah foretelling the Crucifixion," by Blake, c. 1821. 4 3/4 x 3 inches. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

too narrowly concerned with verse techniques or too radically Satanizing.

Additionally, the collection makes it clearer that Milton, more than Shakespeare, was the fulcrum and the omphalos of the critical theorizing of the period and especially of resolving the problem of the role and function of the poet. The Romantics decidedly exercised Wellek's "perspectivism" which "tries to see the object from all possible sides and is convinced that there *is* an object." As if in rejoinder to Johnson's *Life*, the Romantics numbered the streaks on the tulip and considered Milton as polemicist, Puritan, prophet, mythopoeist, and poet; always before them, however, was the object of their deliberations, Milton the Man. It is more than chronologically appropriate, therefore, that the Blake selections begin the anthology.

In his literal-imaginativist way, Blake does apotheosize Milton the Man, and it is a testimony to the strength of character of Case Western Reserve Press that they printed the whole of *Milton* from the Keynes edition. In its new setting, jostled by similar if more parochially-formed expressions, *Milton* gains new significance and becomes at once more singular yet more conventional. Blake's other mode of criticism, his ninety-odd illustrations of Milton's poems, is an acknowledged omission (note 72, p. 21; note 22, p. 101). The cost would no doubt have been prohibitive and we can get by, at least for the time being, with Marcia R. Pointon's numerous reproductions and interesting commentary in *Milton and English Art*. All in all, Wittreich has demonstrated that the Romantics were Milton's fittest audience and that Blake was front row center.

Pierre Boutang. *William Blake*. Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1970.

Reviewed by Simone Pignard

The publication of Pierre Boutang's *William Blake* by the Editions de l'Herne in 1970 indicated a renewed interest in Blake on the part of French critics and readers. Since Pierre Berger's monumental thesis (*William Blake, Mysticism et Poésie*, 1907), this is the first book in the French language which promised to be a substantial critical appraisal of Blake's works. Thus, it is not surprising that the book was received with such an outburst of passion (see the translations of some articles from *Le Monde* in the Winter 1971 issue of the *Blake Newsletter*). Following Pierre Leyris (the author of one of the articles), my main purpose here is to warn the reader against the numerous aberrations in Boutang's book. This work would perhaps have been tolerable in England or in the United States; but given the state of infamy of Blake criticism in France, this book might deprive a prospective Blake reader of the enthusiasm that the reading of Blake should arouse.

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