

*A Concordance to the Rhymes of The Faerie Queene: With Two Studies of Spenser's Rhymes.* Richard Danson Brown and J. B. Lethbridge, eds.

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This volume amply fulfills the mission statement of The Manchester Spenser series, which “seeks work of lasting merit, of the highest standards of historical scholarship, research, handling of evidence and rigour of argument, exposition and documentation.” Such a publisher’s commitment allows elbowroom for expertise that requires patient elaboration. This book could have been half the length it is had it cut to the chase of the concordance at its heart. Giving free rein to the individual strengths of each editor affords a subtle framing of the whole enterprise that guides the reader through complex terrain, touching on key critical debates in early modern poetics.

Despite the cooperative research this project encompasses, the editors’ note, “The Division of Labour,” reveals distinct roles. Lethbridge “is responsible for the original preparation of the text, the preparation of the concordance, elaborations and lists and for all computer issues.” These “were then read and corrected by [Brown], and joint

decisions . . . made as to variants, presentation and contents.” Finally, each editor “provided critical commentary on the Study of the other, and while . . . not always in agreement . . . the Studies also represent the close and enjoyable collaboration of friends over a long period” (xvii).

Brown and Lethbridge say their study “can be divided conceptually into three parts,” although the contents list four, since the appendix — part 4 — is keyed to one of the essays that comprise the opening section, “Critical Studies.” Of the book’s 550 pages, the concordance itself, “the *primum mobile* of the matter” (vii), accounts for 170 pages. The introductory critical section is as long again, while part 3, “Elaborations and Lists,” and the final appendix to Lethbridge’s essay make up the remainder of the text. Part 1 consists of a pair of formidable essays that set the scene for the concordance, not just two introductions for the price of one, but separate sophisticated surveys of the field that are in tension as well as in dialogue. Steering the reader through Spenser’s radical rhyme forms, emphasizing aesthetic qualities, Brown’s erudite and witty treatment makes use of Jarvis Cocker (15) and Bob Dylan (17), showing a Spenserian facility for mixing classical and contemporary allusion in the course of a learned discussion of the poet’s “open-ended receptivity to the interplay between the sonal and the semantic” (75). For Lethbridge, rhyme is all about chains, not charms. In “The Bondage of Rhyme” he maps out the constraints of form, underlining the formulaic nature of Spenser’s cage-rattling rhymes. Yet as with Brown, we arrive at a richly rhetorical reading that is precisely “what the rhyme and its syntax seem to encourage.” In the convergence of each editor’s elegant intervention I was left feeling, “Heads you win, tails you don’t lose.”

Samuel Johnson defined *concordance* as “a book which shows in how many texts of scripture any word occurs,” citing among his examples Swift’s “Letter to a Young Clergyman,” with its caution that “some of you conceive you have no more to do than to turn over a concordance, and there having found the principal word, introduce as much of the verse, as will serve your turn.” Brown and Lethbridge do not regard Spenser as scripture, but they do believe in the power of the printed word, making much of the necessity of a nondigital resource. They justify “the codex in the computer age” on the grounds that the page captures more than the screen — 354 lines, to be precise — so that “the world would be a poorer place without the printed concordance” (xvi). They’re right. Their concordance accords with Spenser’s own use of the word, which appears, fittingly, in the dedicatory epistle by “E. K.” to *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579).

Fittingly, because the *Calender* itself is a kind of concordance, with its own elaborate editorial apparatus. E. K. famously defends that poem’s “disorderly order” on the grounds that “oftentimes a dischorde in Musick maketh a comely concordance.” Brown and Lethbridge’s “comely concordance” is the most important reference work since *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. Most importantly, it works. Readers will come away with a renewed sense of Spenser’s craft and craftiness, and of the poetic possibilities through which, consciously and unconsciously, he was able to work and play.

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