

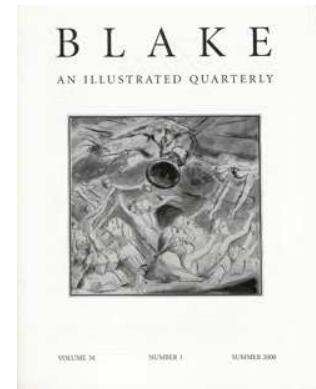
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R E V I E W

Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*

Carl Woodring

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The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake, 1978, pl. 396). The head of the eagle, center left, was presumably done in connection with the frontispiece, and less directly the head-piece, to "The Eagle" (Bindman pls. 390, 391). The lion, for such it seems to be, particularly on account of its large claws, in the center right is not directly related to the depiction of the lion in "The Lion" (Bindman pl. 393) but could well be a study. In the upper left-hand corner of the drawing there are two distinct studies for a human right eye which call to mind the child in Blake's frontispiece to B. J. Malkin's *A Father's Memoirs of His Child*, 1806, though it is impossible to make any specific identification.

The basic information in my catalogue entry seems to be correct given a misdating of some 20 years, with the addition to the provenance of the drawing of Iolo Aneurin Williams, the well-known collector of English drawings and watercolors, about which he wrote an important book, *Early English Water-Colours, and Some Cognate Drawings by Artists Born Not Later Than 1785*, published by *The Connoisseur* in 1952.

Whose Head?

BY HANS-ULRICH MÖHRING

Translating "A Vision of the Last Judgment" into German, and working with the editions of Blake's works by David Erdman (1988) and Geoffrey Keynes (1985), I came upon three words that didn't seem to make sense. Consider the following passage (E 558/K 609): "He is Albion our Ancestor patriarch of the Atlantic Continent whose History Preceded that of the Hebrews & in whose Sleep or Chaos Creation began, [*his Emanation or Wife is Jerusalem who is about to be recievd like the Bride of the*] at their head the Aged Woman is Brittania the Wife of Albion Jerusalem is their Daughter little Infants creep out of the flowery mould into the Green fields of the blessed . . ." The words "at their head" don't relate to anyone. But placed before "little Infants" they would be part of a meaningful sentence.

Looking at David Erdman's and Donald Moore's facsimile edition of *The Notebook of William Blake* (rev. ed. 1977), we see (N 81) that Blake continued the inserted sentence "He is Albion . . ." down the right margin with "& in whose Sleep or Chaos Creation began." Then he wrote "his Emanation or Wife is Jerusalem," while he must have meant the following "at their head" to link up with the main text "little Infants creep. . ." He later amended the short remark about the Emanation with "who is about to be recievd like the Bride of the," but then, obviously having changed his mind, he erased both remark and addendum and replaced them with the line written upside down at the top of the page "the Aged Woman is Brittani[c]a the Wife of Albion Jerusalem is their Daughter." This does not, however, alter the connection between "at their head" and "little Infants creep. . ."

We find this confirmed in the picture of "The Last Judgment" in the Rosenwald Collection (Butlin 645), where the Infants can be seen creeping out of the mould—"at their head," i.e., Albion's and Brittania's. It seems to me that the placement of these three words in the text editions of Blake's works needs to be corrected.

R E V I E W S

Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. x + 323 pp. \$72.

Reviewed by CARL WOODRING

This book marks still another peak in Morton Paley's studies of Blake, Coleridge, and other English poets and painters sublime and romantic. Although Paley knows enough about the subject to produce an encyclopedia or to qualify as one of James Thurber's "get ready" men, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* is a trim book with a compact argument. Taking apocalypse to be an uncovering of ultimate truths, with associated imagery of entrenched evil destructively removed; taking *millenarian* to refer specifically to the Second Coming of Christ; and considering the millennium as—for the Romantics—a less specifically defined final regenerate utopia of social or spiritual peace, Paley attests that the six major English Romantic poets all readily conceived works on apocalyptic revelation, but none found an unproblematic way to continue the narrative into utopian millennium.

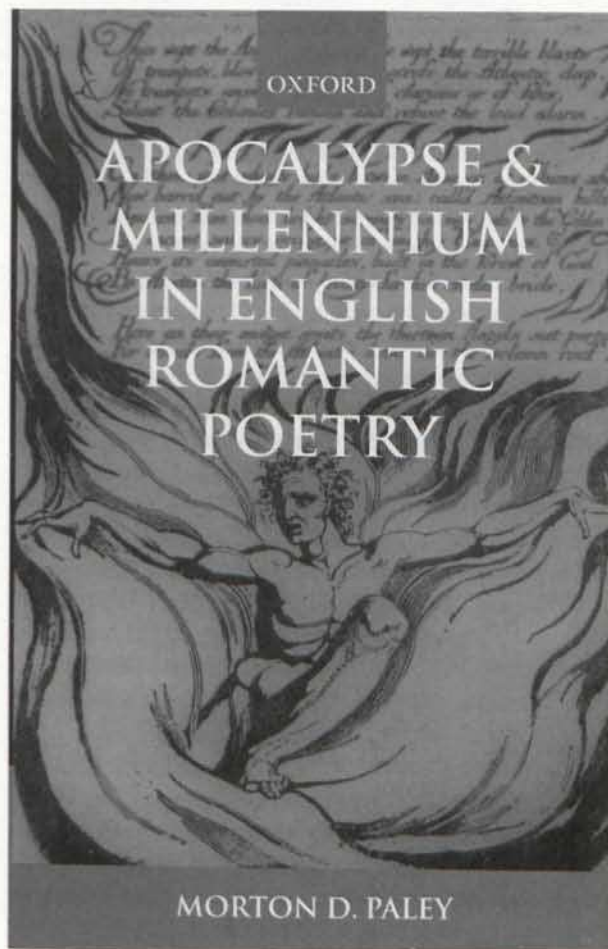
An introduction surveys the pertinent biblical materials and such notable influences on the Romantics as *Paradise Lost* and Thomas Burnet's *Theory of the Earth*. Early pages on Blake add the Swedenborgians, the notorious Richard Brothers, the lesser known Ralph Maher, and the provocation from Burke's excoriation of Price's tribute to the "false apocalypse" in France, with the lesser provocation of Malthus's rebuttal to Godwin's belief in progress. Thereafter, the book follows the main road of significant poems by the six major poets. The method is exegesis, line by line when needed, with attention to the figurative, thematic, and recurrent, such as plague, serpent, and chains, and to allusions explainable by historical context. For each work, early reviews are cited when informative.

Blake and Coleridge occupy the first half of the study, partly because they wrestled longest and hardest with the relation of Christianity to ultimate human destiny, partly

because they offer a full opportunity to relate prophetic and apocalyptic poetry to events in Britain and France between the fall of the Bastille and the fall of Napoleon. As if for convenience in giving Paley's argument a narrative dimension, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* treats apocalypse and millennium as simultaneous, with only the appendage, *A Song of Liberty*, containing closure in a millennial dawn. Paley suggests that Blake, after this beginning in a stasis of contraries, breaks off *The French Revolution* with Book the First because of "the sheer recalcitrance of history"; proposes that no millennium is realized in *America* because slavery had not ended; and shows that in *Europe* Orc remains intensely ambiguous because the cyclic interferes with linear movement toward the utopian (as if the apocalyptic from America had reached Europe without the shackles of slavery, but had joined the ancient cyclic dance there). In contrast with the refusal of political events to fulfill prophecy, which brought to the poetry an increase in war, famine, plague, and fire instead of a quiet millennium, Blake broke off *The Four Zoas*, not so much because events had remained uncooperative, but because he was blessed with a religious conversion (identified in 1965 by Jean Hagstrum). With so much to explain, and with so many insights into particular lines and particular tropes, the chapter will close without mention of Fuseli. By concentrating on poetry, on words, Paley provides in this fine book a counterpart to *The Apocalyptic Sublime* of 1986 on paintings.

Blake was ready in 1804 to apply in *Milton* his new vision. He renewed attention to Swedenborg, perhaps through Charles Augustus Tulk (who awakened Coleridge both to Swedenborg and to Blake's accomplishments), and gained new excitement from the electrical experiments, courage, and compassion of Thomas Birch. He could at last, to his own satisfaction, continue apocalypse into utopia. Here, Paley reminds the already anxious reader, Blake "continues to take both Milton and Wesley further than either would wish to go" (79). But the romantic project of celebrating a collective millennium has at this point been reduced to the union of Milton with the pre-pubescent Ololon, and simultaneously to domestic repose in the cottage of William and Catherine Blake. Romantic poetry provides this study with recurrent examples, as in *Milton*, of a thousand years indistinguishable from an infinite moment. One would not like to think it weariness from editing *Jerusalem* that accounts for the brevity of Paley's appraisal, and not until the chapter on Shelley, that "*Jerusalem* devotes only the last four of its 100 plates of text and design to the millennium" (270-71).

In the opening pages of chapter 2 on Coleridge, he carefully analyzes the relation of the preternatural to prophetic apocalypse in "The Destiny of Nations" and other early poetry. If Coleridge does not in the poems most widely read today concentrate on the Book of Revelation or on Belshazzar or other apocalyptic topics in the Book of Daniel, he spent a lifetime concerned with such cruxes. Paley explicates the resultant early poetry. Coleridge, struggling over the relation



of public fact to poetic invention, as in "Religious Musings," like Blake casts contemporary events "in Prophetic and apocalyptic terms" (109); and like Blake, he encounters perverse resistance from events. Paley agrees with Thomas McFarland and others that the young rebel was much given to "the hysterical sublime." He notes that Coleridge makes his heroic female figures more active than Blake's but the poetic figure himself less active, "a Bardic celebrant, a seer of visions, a roving ambassador of Sensibility" (118). He notes that the private dell in Coleridge is sometimes millennial, even millenarian, but in other instances merely private.

The Napoleonic invasion of Switzerland curbed Coleridge's apocalyptic excesses into the moderated strophes of "France: an Ode" and into renunciation of the curses he had "prophesied" in "Ode on the Departing Year," but he reveled immediately in what Paley calls the "apocalyptic grotesque" of "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," "The Devil's Thoughts" (with Southey), and the extravagantly hostile lampoon on Mackintosh, "The Two Round Spaces on the Tombstone." In an example of Paley's curbing of wit into mere truth, he observes that Coleridge in "Ode on the Departing Year," with its rejection of monarchs such as the "in-

satiate Hag" Catherine the Great, approaches the grotesque: "He may have intended an effect like Dante's vision of Philip the Fair embracing the Whore of Babylon, but he sometimes achieved something closer to the caricatures of Gillray and Isaac Cruikshank" (127). Paley grants to Coleridge's later marginalia and other prose jottings evidence of an interest in Revelation that he does not find in such later poems as "Limbo," to which he gave attention in a wise book of 1996.

Acknowledging that the apocalyptic and millennial lend power to Wordsworth's poems throughout his long career—and can be uncovered in nearly all his adumbrations of peaceful rural life—Paley concentrates on how the two states are related in *The Prelude*. He renders a sensitive account of the discharged soldier episode; at his very best relates the apocalyptic parable of the stone and the shell to Burnet, destruction by deluge, and the Last Man narratives; is informed on the irresolute and ultimately disillusioned treatments of the French Revolution in Books IX-XI; is admirably subtle on the Simplon Pass, and acute on the allegory of Mt. Snowden, where apocalypse and millennium "exist in a perpetual interchange with each other" (188). Wordsworth's internalizations of the apocalyptic in other poems are often too amorphous for Paley's focused examination, but will be fodder for some less scrupulous critic who takes up the subject.

Byron often refers metaphorically to a giant steed from Revelation, but seldom makes it a central topic (193). The exception to such quick glances is of course "Darkness," which evokes comparison with other Last Man narratives (197-209). Paley takes seriously Lucifer's meditations on Cuvier in Act II of *Cain*, and notes that Cain is more realistic than Shelley in reacting to apocalyptic knowledge; he dismisses *Heaven and Earth* from prolonged attention as "merely a disaster scenario" (209, 219). The chronology that assigns the last chapter to Keats creates an anti-climax. The two questions chiefly confronted are Keats's interest in political ideas and events and the relation of the two abandoned Hyperion poems, the first a vision of progress, the second apocalyptic. To the thematic question—why no millennium?—Paley answers that a sequel to apocalypse as Keats presents it cannot be imagined. One can imagine a dedicated Keatsian finding the millennial elsewhere in Keats's poetry unobstructed at least from interpretation, somewhat as one can imagine Victorianists becoming voluble if charged, as the Victorian poets are in the brief epilogue, with neglect of Revelation except in fictional wars of the worlds without the joy of millennium.

Before the anticlimax rises Shelley. Paley demonstrates the foreshadowing by Shelley's apprentice works of the major poems to come. *Queen Mab* is "a rarity," a "long millennial (not millenarian) poem" of slow growth toward perfection (225). A section on "Apocapolitics" studies the "rewriting" of Revelation in *The Mask of Anarchy*, with close attention to the title, the structure, the graphic images, the reversals of meaning, and the poet's hesitant pointing toward a road from apocalypse to millennium. Within a series of perceptive com-

ments, Paley proposes Mortimer's *Death on a Pale Horse* as a better candidate than the possible *Death on the Pale Horse* of Benjamin West as pictorial source for Shelley's Anarchy, "pale even to the lips," on "a white horse, splashed with blood" (239). After the *Masque*, *The Revolt of Islam* serves largely to elucidate the heritage of images such as the serpent of revolution that links Blake, Coleridge, and *Prometheus Unbound*.

To *Prometheus Unbound* Paley devotes care just short of the reverential, for it "provides the most extensive treatment of the millennium to be written during the Romantic period" (253), "the most ambitious and least unsuccessful Romantic attempt to unite apocalypse and millennium" (275). He recognizes the simultaneity that allows the dawn of millennium before apocalypse has been fully realized (261), the amphisbaena's annulling alternative to the ouroboros, and the cyclic that obstructs any assurance of sustained utopia. Although he does not go as far as some of us would in attributing to Asia the predominant power in attaining millennium, he declares Asia unlike Blake's passive Jerusalem in initiating descent into the Cave of Demogorgon (261). He points more precisely than previous critics to the difficulties the "oratorio" of Act IV puts in the way of the more assured ending of Act III. A Shelleyan determined to explore beyond the reach of this book would give more space to *Hellas*.

Paley says nothing about the timeliness of his subject, but every student of Blake, Coleridge, *The Prelude*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and the Romantic period in England should avoid delay in studying this book, even if Clarendon's price makes it easier to own in fancy than in fact.

Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson, editors. *Blake, Politics, and History*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998. xxxiii+387 pp. \$75.

Reviewed by NICHOLAS M. WILLIAMS

In her introduction to this new volume of essays, Jackie DiSalvo sets a high standard for its contributors and for emerging Blake studies more generally. Surveying the work on Blake of the last 60 years, she describes the well-known agon between the Erdman camp of historicists and the Frye camp of literary mythographers, a struggle in some ways recapitulated, although now along national lines, by the current split between American textualists (Nelson Hilton, Donald Ault, Molly Anne Rothenberg and Steven Goldsmith are mentioned) and British historical contextualizers (Ian McCalman, E. P. Thompson, Jon Mee, David Worrall). What she calls for, and it's a goal with which I'm broadly sympa-