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R E V I E W

J. C. F. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular  
Millenarianism 1780-1850*

Morton D. Paley

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images in the *Jerusalem* is perhaps an indication): "The musculature of the figures . . . is defined by twisting cords of thick line, reminiscent of mannerist prints after painters like Spranger or Cornelisz van Haarlem, the coarseness of certain details being redeemed by Blake's never-failing energy of conception." There is nothing that quite approaches the enraptured penetration of minute detail that he brings to, say, Calvert's *Ploughman*.

One may always, of course, question particular preferences in a book of this kind. It seems strange that James Ward's marvellously romantic set of lithographs of *Celebrated Horses* (1824) should be mentioned without any comment at all; but such things are incidents of personal taste and do not obscure the generally just and accurate picture that is painted. It is less understandable why Thomas Bewick is given so little prominence. Historically, he was an enormously influential figure, changing the appearance of English books and periodicals for half a century or more; absolutely, he was among the greatest and most universal of British artists, with a breadth of scope and human compassion worthy of the most showy of his romantic contemporaries. The succinct paragraph devoted to him is less than an adequate recognition of his genius.

In the twentieth century, it is much to Mr. Godfrey's credit that he is able to handle a more recent period with the same measured and historical objectivity as the earlier ones, without sacrificing something of the special feeling of pleasure that is always involved in making choices entirely on our own, without the aid of hindsight and historical perspective. Inevitably, when a consensus has still to be reached as to the relative importance of artists in their time, opinions will differ as to any one choice. But Mr. Godfrey traces a coherent thread which convincingly evokes the enormous quantity of work produced in this century, giving a just prominence to those who are now considered the most distinguished artists--though one wonders whether the time-lapse that enables him to give space to wood-engravers like Gertrude Hermes and Blair Hughes-Stanton will operate to maintain in prominence the figures he selects for the later part of the century: Moore, Hockney, Kitaj, Hamilton, Paolozzi. He could not mention all the minor printmakers now at work, but it is almost too safe a game to concentrate only on the most celebrated contemporaries. However, a number of lesser lights flash past our view: Birgit Skiold, Colin Self, Peter Freeth, Valerie Thornton and Norman Stevens, for instance, provide a suggestion of the welter of activity that has contributed to the great boom in printmaking of the post-war years.

It has unfortunately to be recorded that the book is peppered with small errors and misprints, nearly all of which are unimportant, though they detract from the ease and pleasure of reading to which it otherwise in all respects conduces.

**J. C. F. Harrison. *The Second Coming, Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850.***  
New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979. xvii + 230 pp. (with 8 pp. of illus.). \$19.50.

**Reviewed by Morton D. Paley**

**A**s Professor Harrison points out in his "Bibliographical Note," the subject of popular millenarianism has not been given serious attention by scholars until comparatively recent times. This is to distinguish *popular* millenarianism as a field of study from millenarianism in the Old and New Testaments and in the early Christian church. The latter has always been a respectable subject for research, but the former has all too often been relegated to what Harrison calls "the semi-popular synopsis which provides a rag-bag of freaks, curiosities, imposters and 'unbelievable' characters" (p. 264). Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, first published in 1957, was perhaps the first book to study popular millenarianism with the seriousness that had previously been given to theological millenarianism. Cohn's work, however, is mainly devoted to the medieval period; and its argument that the movements it studies were precursors of modern totalitarianism may be more pertinent to the Middle Ages than to the seventeenth century and after. Christopher Hill's work on seventeenth-century radicalism includes much of the greatest interest on millenarianism during the Puritan revolution.<sup>1</sup> For the period in which Blake lived, the indispensable book on this as well as other aspects of social history is of course *The Making of the English Working Class* by E. P. Thompson, first published in 1963. More



recently, Clarke Garrett has surveyed millenarianism during the period of the French Revolution.<sup>2</sup> To these important books we can now add *The Second Coming*, which studies the millenarianism of a century with considerable erudition, sympathy and insight.

The first of the three main divisions of *The Second Coming* provides a useful overview of the millennial tradition. It does suffer from a problem which besets any overview: there is simply not enough space to treat important subjects as they deserve. To John Pordage and Jane Lead, for example, Harrison can devote only a single paragraph, with a second on their follower Richard Roach; yet this circle has been the subject of an entire book.<sup>3</sup> Likewise Swedenborgianism--or rather the millenarian element of Swedenborgianism--demands far more than the three pages it is given in the second part of *The Second Coming*. Nevertheless, the author is right to concentrate on certain aspects of his subject at the expense of others, for this is not a history of the expectation of the millennium from 1750 to 1850 so much as a study in depth of two millenarian movements set in a wider perspective. The movements are those of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott. *The Second Coming* probably gives more details about the career and adherents of the Prince of the Hebrews than have been presented

before, but it is in his study of Southcott, her followers, and her would-be heirs that Harrison breaks new ground, giving us the beginnings of a social history of the subject. For example the breakdown of Southcottionians by occupation, while necessarily incomplete, is fascinating, leading to the conclusion that "With a following made up of artisans, small tradesman and servants, and a top leadership drawn from the more educated and affluent classes, the believers were socially parallel to the radical reformers or the Methodists" (pp. 110-11). This type of information, along with a sense of the historical importance of what people believed to be true (as, for example, in the case of almanacs), makes *The Second Coming* an important contribution to our knowledge of the period in which Blake lived. The third part of the book, devoted mostly to Shakers, Mormons, and Millerites, is useful chiefly in making comparisons with the subject matter of the second in order to determine what elements were common to millenarian sects.

What of the relation of millenarian movements to Blake himself? A case has been made for connecting Blake, on the basis of similarities of ideas expressed in printed texts, with the antinomians of the seventeenth century<sup>4</sup>; but Blake needs to be "placed" in relation to the millenarianism of his own time as well. I think it fair to say that in this respect *The Second Coming* does not go beyond my own article of 1973,<sup>5</sup> although it does make mention of Blake a number of times and reproduces two pictures it attributes to him. Furthermore, two errors should be corrected. A quotation from *Jerusalem* 27 has been garbled so as to read ". . . Jerusalem was and is the Emanation of the Giant Shore" and then continue "Your ancestors derived . . ." (pp. 80-81). More than four lines of Blake's original text have been dropped by the printer here. Also, one picture reproduced as Blake's is actually a copy after Blake of *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, possibly by John Linnell<sup>6</sup>; and the bracketed title in the caption for this reproduction, "The Midnight Cry" (alluding to Matt. 25.6) has no authority. In general, however, the suggestions about Blake and millenarianism in *The Second Coming* are well taken. A much more extensive treatment of this subject is now in order, but whoever undertakes it will necessarily make use of J. C. F. Harrison's thoughtful and informative book.

<sup>1</sup> See *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1971) and *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972; Penguin ed., 1975).

<sup>2</sup> *Respectable Folly: Millenarianism and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Nils Thune: *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians, a Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> See A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957).

<sup>5</sup> "William Blake, the Prince of the Hebrews, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun," *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 260-93.

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Butlin, *William Blake: a Complete Catalogue of the Works in the Tate Gallery*, rev. ed. (London: Tate Gallery, 1971), p. 54, no. 44.