

Bloom as confessing that he “reread[s] Morrison because her imagination, whatever her social purposes, transcends ideology and polemics and enters again into the literary space occupied only by fantasy, romance, and of authentic aesthetic dignity” (xi). Grewal assumes the contrary position, that Morrison’s writing makes sense to the reader *because* of her politics, once again evidencing her own preferences for isolating a political agenda. Unlike Bloom, the aesthetic dignity of Morrison’s work does not seem to attract her, although she deals with it intelligently in spite of herself in many of the chapters.

Grewal’s book is always at its best when it stays closest to Morrison, whether she is quoting from the novels or echoing Morrison’s words from interviews or speeches. Occasionally the tangled web of critics and their language of ideologies serves to muddy rather than clarify Morrison’s intent. Perhaps therein lies the one blind spot that Grewal brings to her text: she understands the “circles of sorrow” and “lines of struggle” clearly, but she sometimes misses the dazzling beauty of Morrison’s language and the healing joy experienced in sharing her vision. In her chapter about *Jazz*, Grewal explores the dark side of the black experience. She reports, “In *Jazz* we learn that underneath the busy days of the present, black women conceal sorrow and ‘the seep of rage. Molten. Thick and slow-moving’” (127). Granting that position, Grewal does not seem to “hear” the originality, beauty, and intricacies of jazz, the music that Richard Wright in *Twelve Million Black Voices* has called “a banner of hope flung desperately up in the face of a world that has pushed us to the wall.”

It also seems out of place to describe Morrison’s work as “minor literature,” particularly when Morrison herself painstakingly connects her work to the great mythologies, archetypes, and scriptures of the past, including the Christian mythos. The wonder of Morrison’s work is precisely that it has become universal, inviting connections to the human dilemma, not isolating it from humanity’s story. Grewal’s position runs the risk of trivializing Morrison’s work by suggesting that its content is any more or less social or political than the stories of Charles Dickens or Joseph Conrad . . . or even Jesus.

Morrison has it right in her critical essay “Playing in the Dark” when she argues that Africanism is inextricable from any current definition of Americanness. I would argue even further that such characters as Pecola Breedlove, Sula, Milkman Dead, Sethe, Paul D, and the remarkable Baby Suggs Holy have become literary counterparts in the human story . . . and the kingdom of God. Nonetheless, in spite of some limits of vision, Grewal’s attempts to synthesize the work of the major critics of Morrison’s novels into an organized whole is a valuable contribution to literary scholarship.

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*Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time.* By Michael Lieb. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-8223-2268-4. Pp. x + 308. \$18.95 (paper).

In this well researched book Michael Lieb presents a thoughtful description and analysis of how Ezekiel’s vision of God has been appropriated by many would-be prophets and gurus as well as by religious and political leaders in American culture. Tracing its use from John Milton to Louis Farrakhan, Lieb describes how the vision of the fiery chariot is a “defining moment” for the

individual experiencing the vision and the development of his ideology. The vision is the source for “the impulse to fashion a technology out of the ineffable, the inexpressible, the unknowable” (3). The children of Ezekiel of the book’s title are those who seek power in the wonders of technology legitimated by a transcendent vision. Most of these children of Ezekiel use the vision and its technological manifestations as a basis to claim power and authority in a world where they are mostly marginalized.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, “Cultural Transactions and the Poetics of Aggression,” has four chapters. The opening one discusses the way that Milton portrays the chariot in *Paradise Lost* as a divine weapon to counter Satan’s technology, an instrument of divine anger and hatred toward all who would try to thwart the divine will. Politically Milton draws on the vision to legitimate the righteousness of the Puritan Reformation: the Puritans are instruments of the anger of God at those who blaspheme religion. Lieb cites the efforts in the mid-eighteenth century of a German inventor, Melchoir Baur, who sought patronage for the construction of a flying machine inspired by Ezekiel’s vision. In addition, the marvels of the Industrial Revolution, symbolized by the invention of the locomotive, are given biblical authority by seeing technology flowing from Ezekiel’s vision. More recently, Ezekiel’s vision provided a source for the name of Israeli tanks.

In chapter two, “The Psychopathology of the Bizarre,” Lieb surveys the way that Ezekiel’s vision gets literalized as a UFO phenomenon. In fact, for some scientists the vision is actually an attempt to describe an ancient astronaut and his space ship. Popular culture is rife with images of alien contact, as seen in the popularity of Steven Spielberg films and tales of alien abduction. It is amazing that Lieb is able to write about these things with a straight face. But the hunger for transcendence takes concrete technological forms as befits our highly scientific age. The formerly mystical and theological gets “explained” by the application of scientific methodology: the heavens hold no secrets from those who have the keys of interpretive truth. Moving from outer space to cyberspace, Lieb discusses how the vision of Ezekiel is present in the new world of computer technology as seen in such influential writers as William Gibson and Norbert Wiener, as well as in the pop-mystical forms of “New Age” religion and its obsession with technique.

The many forms of “prophecy belief” and the obsession with eschatology are Lieb’s focus in his third chapter, “Prophecy Belief and the Politics of End Time.” Here biblical prophecy gets literalized and technologized by such groups as Jehovah’s Witnesses and those who predict Armageddon through nuclear war. One of the most influential end-timers is Hal Lindsey, whose *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) sold over 18 million copies and was made into a film narrated by Orson Welles. A “prophet” heavily indebted to Ezekiel’s vision, Lindsey seeks to read current political events as fulfillments of biblical prophecy. In the fourth chapter, “Arming the Heavens,” Lieb shows some of the scary political influences and implications of apocalyptic thought. Such thinking has infiltrated our foreign policy and defense planning. Ronald Reagan’s “Star Wars” plan reflected this mentality, as did a number of high officials in his administration. Fantasies, prophecies, and pop culture came together frighteningly during the Reagan era.

The second part of the book, “Ideology, Eschatology, and Racial Difference,” also consists of four chapters, all devoted to the rise and development of the Black Muslims from Master Fard to Elijah Muhammad to Minister Farrakhan. Their belief system stems from each prophet having a vision similar to Ezekiel’s,

whereby the vision of the fiery chariot becomes a giant flying machine, a mother plane, which both protects the prophet and will bring destruction to his enemies. Lieb acknowledges his access to the Nation of Islam during his research, a fact that partly explains his rather uncritical treatment of the movement and its beliefs.

As information-packed as the book is, the reader may at times feel overwhelmed by some of the detailed descriptions and at times redundant analyses. Lieb seeks to be scholarly about pop or crossover cultural phenomena, to treat intellectually what many thousands seriously believe. In one respect this approach is laudable, presenting fair and careful descriptions. In other respects, however, such an approach stays too much at a distance, withholding judgments, evaluations, and interpretations, as would an anthropologist in the field. Are there no bases to distinguish the ludicrous from the serious? While Lieb concludes the book with a kind of joke, on the whole the tone of the writing is anything but light; it is clear but also rather plodding and ponderous. For all the interesting material here, a reader may finish the book wishing the author had done something more. The technologizing and materializing of Ezekiel's vision since the seventeenth century is abundantly traced and described. But the book shows little interest in exploring more interpretive questions such as why this vision is so pervasive and compelling now. Is the vision a phenomenon of particular historical circumstances, of millennial influences? Is it part of a larger gnostic trend? Is it mostly or fully an *American* cultural phenomenon? Is it something that poses a danger to the social order? Who are the critics or resisters to this technological vision? While apparently a desperate form of faith, does it not reflect an abandonment of some central theological doctrines? Why are such apocalyptic visions so appealing to so many? Is the existence of such bizarre forms of belief an index of the failure, in some sense, of theology to make relevant and credible a full biblical faith for our times? A book that contextualized its material to explore some of these issues might have been more speculative, but it might also have been more provocative.

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