

known: it does not mean Jerusalem where it stood.¹¹² In *The Fourth Book of Wonders* (1814), on the other hand, she implies that the old city is fundamental to the eschatological plan: 'for I shall cast out all the heathens for their sakes, and now establish the THRONE OF DAVID for ever in Jerusalem, as I have promised. For, *where I was crucified, I will be exalted; where I died for MAN, my SON shall reign over MAN.*'¹¹³ Nevertheless, even when she does allude to the earthly Jerusalem, it is always to the ancient city depicted in Scripture: the tension, if it exists, is not so much between England and a present-day reality in the East, but between England and a textual representation that can always be applied, yet again, to the 'happy land'. Clinging to the Bunyanesque, Southcott's formulations always fall back, eventually, on the terms most familiar to both her followers and herself. The Holy Land as a geographical reality that might contradict or complicate her interpretation of prophecy did not seem to trouble her.

This was hardly the case with Richard Brothers.¹¹⁴ Born in 1757 in Placentia, Newfoundland, Brothers was sent to England to join the Navy. He became a midshipman at the age of 14, fought in several battles, and was promoted to lieutenant. Following the Peace of Versailles, he retired on half-pay, which allowed him to tour the Continent. Since he refused, on religious grounds, to take the oath required for the receipt of his pension, he soon fell into debt, was sent to a workhouse, and later to prison. In 1792, the same year that Southcott first heard the Spirit, Brothers decided to leave England, when he was suddenly notified by God that he was the Prince of the Hebrews and the Nephew of the Almighty, descended from King David through James, one of the brothers of Jesus. In 1794 he published *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times*, which anticipated that the Kingdom of Christ was at hand. Some of the revolutionary aspects of his teaching alarmed the authorities; arrested in March 1795 and examined by the Privy Council

¹¹² Joanna Southcott, *The Third Book of Wonders, Announcing the Coming of Shiloh; with a Call to the Hebrews* (London: W. Marchant, 1814), 16.

¹¹³ Joanna Southcott, *The Fourth Book of Wonders, Being the Answer of the Lord to the Hebrews* (London: W. Marchant, 1814), 51.

¹¹⁴ On Brothers see Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, chs. 8–9; Harrison, *Second Coming*, esp. ch. 4; Thompson, *Working Class*, 127–9; Cecil Roth, *The Nephew of the Almighty: An Experimental Account of the Life and Aftermath of Richard Brothers, RN* (London: Edward Goldston 1933); John Barrell, 'Imagining the King's Death: The Arrest of Richard Brothers', *History Workshop Journal*, 37 (1994), 1–32; DNB.

on suspicion of treason, Brothers was eventually committed to a lunatic asylum, where he continued to develop his millenarian designs. He was released in 1806, residing with a few faithful supporters until his death in 1824.

Central to Brothers's eschatology was the 'departure of the Hebrews from all nations, and their return to Jerusalem', which, he calculated, would take place in 1798.¹¹⁵ Unlike Southcott, who often insisted that the prophecy of Jewish restoration 'alludes to the restoration of faith',¹¹⁶ Brothers urged the Jews to 'collect all their property and depart in great haste from all nations to their own land'.¹¹⁷ He himself would lead them back and undertake the building of the New Jerusalem. 'It is fifteen hundred years since my family was separated from the Jews, and lost all knowledge of its origin,' he explained.¹¹⁸ Only divine intervention allowed him to discover his real identity, as a descendant of the House of David.

Whereas Southcott follows Bunyan in imagining England as that 'happy land', Brothers's geographical imagination is considerably broader: the New Jerusalem is to be built on the devastation of the present Jerusalem in the Middle East. Consequently, his entire corpus is an elaborate effort to address the endless technicalities demanded by this new Exodus. Relying on travel accounts by Wood and Bruce, who visited the East in the mid-eighteenth century,¹¹⁹ he points out

that the whole land of Israel is now quite a desert, and that on entering it, I have first to divide it into numerous portions, then get it cultivated with the plough and the shovel, to sow seed and plant trees; I have harbours to make for shipping, and store-houses for immediately receiving what is landed from them; high roads to make; and water-courses to form; materials to provide, and cities to build . . .¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Richard Brothers, *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times* (London, 1794), i, 12, 14.

¹¹⁶ Joanna Southcott, *The True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications* (London: S. Rousseau, 1804), 409.

¹¹⁷ Brothers, *Revealed Knowledge*, ii, 129.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, i, 78.

¹¹⁹ Richard Brothers, *A Description of Jerusalem: Its Houses and Streets, Squares, Colleges, Markets, and Cathedrals, the Royal and Private Palaces, with the Garden of Eden in the Centre, as Laid Down in the Last Chapters of Ezekiel* (London: G. Riebau, 1801), 68, 74.

¹²⁰ Richard Brothers, *A Letter from Mr. Brothers to Miss Cott . . . with an Address to the Members of His Britannic Majesty's Council* (London: G. Riebau, 1798), 134.

To accomplish this, Brothers appeals to numerous nations, from Abyssinia to Japan, presenting each with a detailed list of provisions required to establish the new 'Hebrew empire'.¹²¹ Russia, for example, is requested to send 400 shiploads of timber, 6,000 barrels of beef, 40,000 tents 'with kettles and ovens in proportion', in addition to the 300 shiploads of timber, 100 large wagons, 800 wheelbarrows, etc., required from each country. England should donate 100,000 tons of coal, 10,000 tons of beef, 90,000 sacks of flour, and so forth, in endless detail.¹²² At first, Brothers's plans seem to reflect the urgency of the project, but the crazed list soon loses all sense of operative meaning and becomes a mere textual construct, mimicking similar biblical inventories.

In some instances, Brothers maintains that prophecy should be understood allegorically. In Revelation 21, John 'is so struck with wonder at being shewn, in a vision, the appearance of this matchless city... that he compares the walls to Jasper, the city itself to fine gold!', but the description 'must be taken in a metaphorical sense'.¹²³ More often than not, however, Brothers insists on a thoroughly literal realization of prophecy. A typical example concerns the New Jerusalem's 'river of water of life'. In both Ezekiel's and John's visions, there is a wide river flowing through the city, a fact which simply does not correspond with the topographical reality of the old Jerusalem. According to Brothers's *A Description of Jerusalem* (1801), to ensure that 'the great and splendid city' would indeed be built, the 'present form' must be 'altered to a necessary level by sinking the Mount of Olives, or removing it, and by bringing again a good river of water through that ground'.¹²⁴ To realize the biblical vision, the existing topography must yield to the biblical text.

Brothers devotes much thought to the transformation of Palestine into a green and pleasant woodland 'in such a manner as will set off the land to appear lively and delightful'.¹²⁵ Similarly, his meticulous designs for Jerusalem, based on the descriptions in Ezekiel and Revelation, present a perfectly proportioned city. With a Garden of Eden, a glorified

¹²¹ Ibid. 23.

¹²² Ibid. 90–1, 89, 123.

¹²³ Richard Brothers, *A Letter to the Subscribers for Engraving the Plans of Jerusalem* (London: G. Riebau, 1805), 38.

¹²⁴ Brothers, *Description of Jerusalem*, 17.

¹²⁵ Brothers, *Miss Cott*, 81.

Hyde Park, at its centre, and buildings and streets reminiscent of Nash's work in Regent Street,¹²⁶ Jerusalem would easily eclipse the capitals of Europe: 'Look at London and Paris, those two great and wealthy cities, there are no such regular streets in either, or healthy accommodations as in ours.'¹²⁷

These geographical and architectural transformations had their racial equivalent, which brings us to the most remarkable aspect of Brothers's teaching. It was not only Brothers himself who was of Hebrew extraction; many English men and women could boast a similar lineage. Those closest to Brothers were lucky enough to belong to the prestigious house of David; others were the descendants of the lost ten tribes, those Israelites captured by the Assyrians, exiled and eventually scattered throughout Europe, 'having lost all remembrance, either by tradition or genealogical manuscript, of such a distinctive origin'. That they were now 'different in dress, manners and religious ceremonies from the visible Jews' should not deceive the students of prophecy.¹²⁸ In short, most of the Hebrews who would be restored by Brothers to Palestine were actually English Christians: 'It is plain that it is not the visible Hebrews that are meant, because they are known as such already; but it is the invisible Hebrews, descended from the old, that are to be singled out and distinguished from the strange people they live amongst.'¹²⁹

The conviction that the English were God's chosen nation goes all the way back to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. What is unique about Brothers is his ability to accommodate two contradictory traditions. In his claim that prophecies about 'Israel' refer to the Jews, Brothers joins Faber, Priestley, and their eminent colleagues who see the Jews as the object (and the English as agents) of conversion and restoration. At the same time, by insisting that the 'real' Jews are in fact the English, Brothers shares with Southcott—if not Winstanley and Bunyan—the fantasy of belonging, literally, to God's elected race. Of course, whereas Southcott's interpretation is essentially spiritual, Brothers's argument is genealogical (even though he, too, dismisses the Jewish ritual of circumcision and

¹²⁶ Roth, *Nephew of the Almighty*, 84.

¹²⁷ Brothers, *Description of Jerusalem*, 34.

¹²⁸ Richard Brothers, *Wrote in Confinement: An Exposition of the Trinity* (London: G. Riebau, 1796), 25.

¹²⁹ Brothers, *Miss Cott*, p. xii.

emphasizes the spiritual aspects of belief instead).¹³⁰ Just as he bends the topography of Jerusalem to allow the literalization of prophecy, Brothers develops a racial theory which enables him to literalize the familiar analogy between England and Israel. Brothers can thus voice grievances associated with specific class-oriented aspirations, particularly the want of land, but resolve them by shifting to a colonial framework: 'All the families which I have recognised as of Hebrew extraction, are... entitled, as well as the visible professed Jews, to reside in their native land, whether in city or country, or alternately in both if they like: although the distribution of the land belongs to me, yet as brethren our right of inheritance is general.'¹³¹ While polite millenarians approached the Jewish restoration to Palestine as a project that could benefit British imperialism, Brothers's proto-British Israelism made the 'Hebrew empire' a British colonial project *par excellence*.

From this fusion of millenarian vocabulary, colonial visions, and working-class aspirations, an extraordinary narrative emerges. 'Palestine, 3211 years ago, when the Hebrews entered it from Egypt, abounded with springs and rivers, corn, wine, and oil,' writes Brothers; 'but now all is barren, as if never inhabited by our ancestors.' Nevertheless,

many of these difficulties [are] easily conquered, by a wise people fortified with courage and perseverance; for it is our own country, and the only one we can live free in. Therefore, every man and woman must call up to their assistance every energy of patience, virtue, and industry, to settle the foundation of all future praise and all future benefit, by putting as many parts of the country as possible into a state of cultivation.¹³²

This probably sounds familiar: the barren land restored to its former glory; the appeal for patience and industry; and, above all, the conviction that 'it is our own country, and the only one we can live free in'. Indeed, Brothers's account is conspicuously similar to the official Zionist version which would emerge almost a century later (relying heavily on both millenarian and colonial imagery). Like the Zionists, Brothers explains that the Hebrew empire would initiate a commercial burst of growth, 'so that no one can lose by the change, but, on the contrary, all will materially gain'.¹³³ But he, too, never stops to consider the fate of

¹³⁰ Ibid. 76–7.

¹³¹ Ibid. 80.

¹³² Brothers, *Description of Jerusalem*, 43–4.

¹³³ Richard Brothers, *The New Covenant between God and his People* (London: A. Snell, 1830), 6.

the present inhabitants of the Holy Land who are to give way to the colonizers. It is Palestine's indigenous population that remains truly invisible.

Southcott and Brothers, then, imagine very different 'Jerusalems'; but how can we account for these diverse visions? And to what extent do they reflect broader cultural undercurrents?

There is little doubt that the experience which moulded Brothers's perception of the world—and which made him, in many ways, an exceptional figure in popular millenarian circles—was his long service in the Royal Navy. It enabled him to expand his geographical imagination, to translate abstract textual descriptions into topographical detail, and to grasp the practical implications of travel.¹³⁴ Only an awareness of Palestine's geographical reality, and a seaman's mentality, can account for his endless inventories of supplies needed to make the desert blossom. In both scholarship and expression, Brothers was much closer to Priestley and Bicheno than to Southcott; what distanced him from the respectable millenarians was his insistence on the personal role assigned to himself (and to the rest of the 'invisible' Jews). Challenged with Palestine's irrepressible existence, Brothers adopted the radical working-class appropriations of 'Holy Land' and 'Chosen People', but transferred them back to the geographical region in which they were initially forged. The result is a pseudo-jingoistic attempt to solve working-class grievances by turning to the colonial framework: the promise of land, Brother explains, is possible only in the Promised Land.

Joanna Southcott, by contrast, never left England. There is little evidence that books, other than the Bible and her aunt's hymnal, affected her development. Her upbringing, education, and occupation all link her to deep-rooted provincial traditions: no wonder she was much less knowledgeable about the outside world. So, although Napoleon looms large over many of her prophecies, the emphasis is always on England's survival and safekeeping, rather than on any imperial vision. Closely associated with English life, customs, and landscape, the immediacy of Southcott's Jerusalem and the soothing familiarity which it evokes—as opposed to Brothers's fantasy in the desert—may explain

¹³⁴ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10, 294.

why her following was considerably larger, and her influence more enduring. The Holy Land was simply too far away to demand any real consideration.

This seems to be true of her followers as well: shocked by Southcott's untimely death, some of them embarked on a journey to Jerusalem. The little that we know about this specific group comes from a sarcastic pamphlet, *An Interesting Account of the Proceedings of the Followers of the Late Joanna Southcott, Shewing the Folly of Their Intended Departure for the City of Jerusalem with a Full Description of That Ancient and Celebrated City, Its Laws, Government, etc.* (1817). The anonymous author mocks these 'chosen few'—the High Priest, the Female Secretaries, and the West-Riding Merchant, that plain and undesigning Yorkshireman—who are making their way to the 'golden city' where they hope to find the newly resurrected Joanna. It is not so much the millenarian folly which annoys the writer, however, as the travellers' inability to grasp the palpable dimensions of Jerusalem. Since 'they have not received accurate information with respect to that important point', some imagine 'that the great waters will be frozen over, so as to afford an *easy* passage', while others 'are in daily expectation of seeing the sky overspread with clouds, from which a plentiful supply of *ASSES* is to issue'. Presuming that many of Southcott's disciples 'have not, in the course of their reading, paid much attention to the situation of Palestine', the writer finally reaches the real purpose of his work: an accurate topographical description of Jerusalem and the surrounding country, based on the travels of Dr Shaw, who visited Palestine in the 1730s.¹³⁵ The pamphlet undoubtedly overplays the Southcottians' confusion (indeed, the entire account might well be fictitious); yet this band of distressed millenarians, anxious to reach the Holy Land but overwhelmed by the corporeal implications of the quest, captures a representational crisis typical of the period.

It would be only appropriate to end with another 1790s prophet, William Blake, and his beautiful lines from *Jerusalem*, a natural sequel to the short poem from *Milton*.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *An Interesting Account* . . . (London: T. Nicholson, 1817), 12, 10–11, 12.

¹³⁶ On Blake, Brothers, and Southcott see Morton D. Paley, 'William Blake, The Prince of the Hebrews, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun', in Paley and Michael Curtis Phillips (eds.), *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 260–93.

The fields from Islington to Marybone,
 To Primrose Hill and Saint Johns Wood:
 Were builded over with pillars of gold,
 And there Jerusalems pillars stood.¹³⁷

This, Harold Bloom has noted, is one of Blake's most personal poems, 'an autobiographical epitome of the whole of *Jerusalem*'. The places named in subsequent stanzas—'The Ponds where Boys to bathe delight: / The fields of Cows by Willans farm' (p. 172)—were associated by Blake with his own childhood (p. 935); once again, we encounter the familiar infantile fantasy of discovering the Holy Land in one's own vicinity.

Blake elaborated this theme throughout his adult life. In the prophetic books written during and after 1804, Jerusalem—whether she is thought of as the daughter of Albion, a spiritual presence, or a pillared structure—is associated primarily with Britain. Indeed, as A. L. Owen has shown, between 1797 and 1804 Blake became convinced that Britain, not Palestine, was the original Holy Land.¹³⁸ 'All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore', wrote Blake in his address 'To the Jews' in *Jerusalem* (p. 171). This should be understood in its most literal sense, just like the short poem from *Milton* which means, literally, 'I shall struggle to restore our own lost British Jerusalem'.¹³⁹

What is especially revealing is Blake's vernacular Orientalism. Informing a friend about Blake's new work, Robert Southey described 'a perfectly mad poem called *Jerusalem*—Oxford Street is in Jerusalem'.¹⁴⁰ But Southey was wrong: it was Jerusalem in Oxford Street, never the other way around. Blake's rearrangement of the scriptural geography in the English landscape, the allotment of the British Isles between the twelve tribes, the image of Golgonooza which fuses Ezekiel's vision with the bricks and mortar of London—all these exhibit an ingenious reworking of the Bunyanesque tradition. There is, however,

¹³⁷ *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, comm. Harold Bloom (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1982), 171. Subsequent page numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹³⁸ A. L. Owen, *The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature on the Druids* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 233, 225.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 235.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Ruthven Todd, *Tracks in the Snow: Studies in English Science and Art* (London: Grey Walls, 1946), 46.