



Omens of the Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams & Resurrection

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In this impassioned, erudite, and provocative work, Harold Bloom, bestselling author and America's foremost literary and cultural critic, examines society's "New Age" obsessions: angels, prophetic dreams, and near-death experiences. **Omens of Millennium** traces these cultural phenomena from their ancient and traditional origins to their present-day, millennial manifestations. In addition, it is a personal account of Bloom's Gnosticism. Certain to educate, challenge, and entertain, **Omens of Millennium** is as fascinating as it is timely.

Omens of the Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams & Resurrection Details

Date : Published October 1st 1997 by Riverhead Books (first published 1996)

ISBN : 9781573226295

Author : Harold Bloom

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Religion, Nonfiction, Theology, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Fantasy, Mythology

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From Reader Review Omens of the Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams & Resurrection for online ebook

Bill Tucker says

As of New Year's Day 2012, I haven't quite finished this one. I enjoy Bloom's writing, and the subject matter is fascinating...though the advent of the new millennium has long past, it's still not the least bit dated or irrelevant. Unless something unfortunate transpires in the last 35ish pages, this is a five-star offering.

Kirk Bresniker says

I have no idea how I got a copy of this book or why I started reading it, but whatever chance of fate led me to it, it was extremely rewarding. The breadth of cultures examined for the Gnostic thread was enlightening.

I don't know if I was fortunate or not in having read this book prior to popular culture stumbling into Gnosticism, via Madonna's Kabbalah studies or Philip Pullman's Dark Materials books. In particular, I think that this book ruined Pullman's work for me, exposing his creation as too thin a vernier of characterization and plot over these recurrent themes.

Ryan says

This book will do two things to you: 1. make you rethink your concept of spirituality and 2. make you want to read more content about what has become an increasingly neglected aspect of humanity -- personal spirituality.

oh yeah, it will also 3. make you read everybook like it has, or should have, some content that will increase your understanding of self.

Frederick Jackson says

Yuk. There may be something here, and believe me I was sympathetic, but I could not find it. Bloom is fishing, trying to get a bead on a difficult subject. So trying to follow him in this exercise can be painful. Try reading, instead, the great Sufi master Hezrat Inyat Khan. When Inyat Khan speaks of angels, "He speaks as a man with authority". (Even so, one does not have to buy it.) A great part of my spiritual path -- and joy -- lies in doubt. Bloom is trying to find his bliss (to borrow a phrase from Joseph Campbell) and a place in Heaven but it seems as if he cannot simply express his doubts, but must couch them in erudition. So there is a lot of intellectual dithering.

Bob Wake says

[Reviewed in 1998]

Harold Bloom, well into his sixth decade, exudes a lifetime of literary study and critical thinking, coupled with an irascible penchant for gnomic generalizations and grumpy political asides. *Omens of Millennium*—his 22nd book—manages to combine literature, religion, and politics in sometimes brilliant, sometimes baffling ways, which is to say it's quintessential Bloom. While casting a disdainful eye on New Age spirituality in America, he presents us with a historical look at the rich religious traditions that form the basis for our fascination with angels, near-death experiences, and dream visions. Equally, Bloom defines his book as a "spiritual autobiography," and interwoven throughout the text are references to his personal odyssey, including a breakdown at age 35 ("I got very wretched, and for almost a year was immersed in acute melancholia") that first led him to study Gnosticism and find solace within its dark, existential spheres.

Born in New York City in 1930, he began his teaching career in 1955 at Yale (where today he is Sterling Professor of Humanities, in addition to a concurrent position at New York University as Berg Professor of English), and published his first book in 1961. Like Edmund Wilson before him—whom Bloom most resembles in his exuberant overreaching into subjects like religion and political history that lie outside his more assured literary purview—Bloom is often at his most interesting when making provocative, even outrageous assertions. But of course those very qualities which make *Omens of Millennium* quintessential Bloom are also those qualities which confound mainstream book reviewers, and incite critics like Michiko Kakutani in the *New York Times* to characterize the book as "an incoherent work—discursive, self-indulgent and a trial to try to read."

Omens of Millennium above all is an encomium to Gnosticism, the profoundly heretical religious movement of the second century, C.E. So enraptured is Bloom with Gnosticism's creative upturnings and reversals of traditional Judeo-Christian tenets, that he finds within its nose-thumbing paradoxes a sublime emphasis on individuality similar to Emersonian self-reliance. Bloom has been mining this territory for several decades now—the Gnosticism inherent in our American character—but *Omens of Millennium* goes even further, with Bloom outing himself as a full-fledged Gnostic and closing the book with a twenty-one page Gnostic "sermon," in which he declares: " 'Thrown' is the most important verb in the Gnostic vocabulary, for it describes, now as well as two thousand years ago, our condition: we have been thrown into this world, this emptiness."

If the phrase "we have been thrown into this world" seems to echo the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, there is good reason for this: the book which inspired Bloom's Gnostic conversion 30 years ago was *The Gnostic Religion*, originally published in 1934 by Heidegger's pupil Hans Jonas. The thrust of Bloom's theology takes off from Jonas's now famous epilogue appended to the 1958 edition of *The Gnostic Religion* and titled "Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism." A remarkable synthesis of Gnostic thought with the philosophies of Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, Jonas's epilogue continues even today to influence readers with its unique perspective, blending as it does cultural pessimism with personal transcendence. It presents a far more radical interpretation of Gnosticism than, say, Elaine Pagels's extremely popular, but sanitized and New Age-ish *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979).

To the extent that an "essential" Gnostic philosophy can be distilled from its many strains and off-shoots, it appears at heart to suggest a deep distrust of religious and political institutions and authority. Gnosticism preached that the God of Judeo-Christian tradition—the God of the Bible—was an imposter, an insane "demiurge" who sloppily created our false reality of flesh and sorrow, and who has no relation to the true

Supreme Being whose existence is distant and removed from our corrupt world.

Bloom believes that the Gnostic paradigm offers the only cogent explanation for the existence of evil, which is described as stemming from the psychotic demiurge who created our world, rather than the real God, the estranged creator:

The transcendent stranger God or alien God of Gnosticism, being beyond our cosmos, is no longer an effective force; God exists, but is so hidden that he has become a nihilistic conception, in himself. He is not responsible for our world of death camps and schizophrenia, but he is so estranged and exiled that he is powerless. We are unsponsored, since the God of this world, worshipped (as Blake said) by the names of Jesus and Jehovah, is only a bungler, an archangel-artisan who botched the False Creation that we know as our Fall.

Gnosticism encouraged the idea that within each of us is a divine spark connected to this “alien” Supreme Being. The Gnostic mandate is thus to reveal and nourish the divine spark and manifest our true spiritual origins. The theme of “hidden truth” is common of course to innumerable varieties of mysticism, alchemy, and Kabbala, as well as “secular” enterprises such as Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis. New Age spirituality, too, promises its adherents a glimpse into deeper, more “authentic” realms.

Harold Bloom has little patience for the New Age, which he sees as a debasement of religious and literary history. He appreciates the yearnings that give rise to spiritual trends and fads, but he believes that Americans today are seeking easy answers to difficult questions of faith. Our current obsession with angels, for example, he finds particularly shallow:

To find your angel is not necessarily to find yourself, though most quests for the angels seem nowadays to suppose that a guardian angel is rather more like a dog or cat than like a husband or wife. You acquire an angel in the expectation that this addition to your household will give you perpetual and unconditional love.

Bloom wants to restore to us the terrifying grandeur with which angels, as well as dreams and near-death experiences, have been portrayed in the distant past. To this end, he guides us through complex Gnostic myths and fascinating interpretations of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian literature, as well as the works of John Milton and William Blake, both of whom he’s written on extensively over the years. Bloom is clearly revisiting some well-trod paths of his previous books, but he is a master at reconceptualizing his observations and placing them in fresh contexts. His life-long interest in Freud forms the basis for the brilliant chapter, “Sigmund Freud’s Dream Book,” which locates *The Interpretation of Dreams* within a framework of mysticism and hermeneutics.

Is *Omens of Millennium* a great or essential book? Perhaps not. It is, however, a fine showcase for one of our very best “readers.” Bloom’s textual interpretations are always deft and enthusiastic, and he is equally at ease with Shakespeare or Freud, the Book of Daniel or *Paradise Lost*. The most damaging flaw of *Omens of Millennium* is the book’s lack of a bibliography and index, not to mention footnotes, all of which would have been useful, and without which the book is rendered rather hopeless as scholarship. There are dozens of intriguing sources that Bloom alludes to or quotes from throughout his book, but the quotations—sometimes

lengthy—are minus citations of any kind. Bloom’s arguments are never less than fascinating, but *Omens of Millennium* has the slapdash feel of a project written and published quickly to cash in on the very same rapacious New Age marketplace that Bloom lambasts so vociferously in the pages of his book.

James P says

Eclectic view of mysticism, a good follow on to American Religion helps gain perspective on his approach to reality particularly if one is not a fan...

Fred Kohn says

Hard to rate this strange little book. The title is very misleading; this is a book about "mere gnosticism," an excellent term, I think, playing upon C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity. *Mere Gnosticism* would have been so much a better title! The millennium spoken of is not so much the expectation of the religious millennialists I was expecting as the approaching third millenium of the Common Era; this book was written in 1995. I was expecting something scholarly; it's Harold Bloom, after all. The scholarly stuff is there, but that is hardly the point of the book. The book is best understood as a personal adventure, and in that sense it doesn't succeed very well; precisely *because* of too much scholarship! When it came to rating, I had to split the difference. The chapter on angels and the chapter on gnosis were excellent. But the chapter on dreams and the chapter on near death experiences seemed to have little to do with the rest of the book. So: three stars.

Jim says

Is there a living American who is more well read and erudite than Harold Bloom? In this brilliant Bloomian exposition, Professor Bloom traces the American brand of Millennialism (so commercialized and debased) to ancient Gnostic, Sufi, Hermetic, and Kabbalistic texts and ultimately to Zoroastrianism. This is a book that deserves a second or third reading because there is so much to absorb.

Cooper Cooper says

Harold Bloom is a Yale literary and religious critic who has produced many works, including the well-known *The Book of J* and *The Western Canon*. *Omens of Millenium* springs from two sources: first, it was inspired by the spiritual stirrings evident in Americans as they approached the second Millenium, and second, it represents a “spiritual search” by Bloom himself that apparently commenced with a mental breakdown (deep and unremitting depression) 40 years ago. Bloom simply could not accept the conventional Christian or Jewish Gods who are both all-powerful and benign—for how could such a deity possibly countenance such cruelties as the Holocaust? Bloom searched for an alternative.

And discovered the Gnostics.

Gnostics believe that one discovers God not by faith (blind belief) or by good works but by knowing.

Knowing in this case means direct intuitive experience by the individual—usually ecstatic communion.

Bloom: “Gnostics, poets, people-of-letters share in the realization of knowing that they know.” “Creativity and imagination, irrelevant and even dangerous to dogmatic religion, are essential to Gnosticism.” Gnosis

has long been considered heretical (what else?) by the major religions, which in their usual tolerant way attempted to liquidate the dissidents. On the surface, the Catholic Church appeared finally to put an end to the heresy when it annihilated the Cathars (Albigensians) in Provence, France, in the 13th Century (this was the original purpose of the Inquisition). The Cathars ended, but Gnosticism went underground. And indeed: in Bloom's view, since about 1800 Americans, without realizing it, have been more Gnostic than Christian. Gnosticism also permeates the esoteric versions of Judaism (Kabbalism) and Islam (Shi'ite Sufism). Some of Bloom's more interesting observations:

*Influence of Zoroaster—Bloom traces the historical development of such "Christian" ideas as immortality, the Resurrection, and the devil directly to Zoroaster—the ancient prophet from what is now Iran. These ideas, variously interpreted and modified, were picked up first by Judaism, then by Christianity, and then by Islam. And also by the Gnostics, who stayed closer to the Zoroaster original than the others did. Zoroaster taught that there are two equally powerful gods, the good god (Ahura Mazda) and the evil god (Angra Mainyu), that these gods are continually at war in the world, and that not until the end of time will Ahura Mazda finally eke out a win over Angra Mainyu.

*The Creation—Among Gnostics there have been many versions of the Creation—and all differ from the orthodox Christian version. Bloom has put together a composite, which goes something like this: in the beginning was the Pleroma ("Fullness"), a place or condition of peace and fulfillment. From the Pleroma were produced, at the same time, both God and man—in other words, God did not create man but is coeval with him. Not only that: God and man were thrown into different worlds, so that God cannot affect man and is in fact as forlorn and alienated as man is—both experienced the Fall together (for this was the Fall into degradation—the Adam-snake-apple-Eve story is nonsense, for how can man be blamed for his own primal condition?). Along with God was created the Demiurge—the Evil One who fashioned and rules our material world. The objective of the Demiurge is to keep the world going—and to block any return to the Pleroma. How return? Each human has a tripartite spirit: the body-soul, which dies with the body; the ru'ah, which after a year in quarantine (as penalty for any bad deeds), goes off to a reconstituted Garden of Eden; and the pneuma, or divine spark, which returns to the paradise of the Pleroma (but still retains its individuality). Hence, the human personality is immortal.

*The Zone—Many Gnostics believe that there is a zone intermediate between man and the Pleroma, and that spiritual adepts, artists and others at home in the world of images have access to this zone—and in fact spend much of their time there. In neurophysiological terms, the zone is an "altered state," the theta state of relatively slow brainwaves, the hypnagogic state one experiences just before falling asleep—a state in which vivid images appear spontaneously in a sort of waking dream. It is in this zone, this land of images, that we meet the angels (benign and demonic) and experience intimations of immortality. Bloom: "It is this imaginal or middle world, and not the suprasensible realm of God, that provides our intimations of immortality and that holds the promise of resurrection."

*The Millennium—Bloom saw in America, as it approached the Millennium, intensified preoccupation with things spiritual—obsession with angels, for instance, and with prophetic dreams and near-death experiences (NDE's). The stirrings he applauded but at the same time he was bothered by America's trivialization and commercialization of the spirit. For example, the bland simpering angels of contemporary America are nothing like the angels of the Sufis or the Kabbalists—angels "terrifying to behold." Bloom: "Our current domestication of the angels renders them insipid." The fallen angels are naturally hostile to man but Bloom points out that in most traditions the unfallen angels are at best ambivalent about us—not the happy little helpers the New Age makes them out to be. Bloom seems to be calling for us to dump our wimpy angels and replace them with power-angels who inspire deep respect and even awe, and also to raise our religiosity from wussy New Age feel-good to blasts of spiritual ecstasy—"the knowing in which we become one with what is

known.”

Bloom closes the book like this: “If you know yourself as having an affinity with the alien, or strange God, cut off from this world, then you are a gnostic, and perhaps the best and strongest moments still come to what is best and oldest in you, to a breath or spark that long precedes this Creation. In those moments, you do not know death.” Presumably meaning that we are indeed immortal—during moments of spiritual ecstasy. If that’s any consolation.

Bloom reminds me of C.S. Lewis in that both try so hard. Raised in the Age of Science, they want in the worst way to worship the Spirit. Bloom strains like a rabbinical scholar over interpretations; you can almost hear his neurons snapping and feel the sweat forming on his face. He does make many interesting historical connections, and he does address the spiritual vacuity of our time; but his particular brand of gnosis somehow fails to convince—himself, I suspect, as well as us. The subject matter of this book is very interesting. The book itself is full of little historical jewels but you’ll have to dislodge some rocks to get to them.

A says

An incredibly interesting, engaging read, but ultimately frustrating and fails to bind together the diverse range of subjects and sources. What I liked most about the book is the stuff I already know. I discovered Gnosticism around the time the book was written, during that wonderful millennial fervor of the late 1990s, and Bloom successfully pinpoints what is so engaging about Gnosticism and the little related mystical wings within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. More specifically, he focuses on Jewish Kabbalah and Sunni Sufism. He nearly makes the common mistake of conflating the rather diverse field of early Christian Gnosticism, but (thankfully) he makes the effort to clarify Valentinian myth and specify texts individually. The depth and breadth of his references will be incredibly useful for future study, so kudos to him for that. Beyond this, the writing itself is solid, though Bloom is at times overly discursive and I agree with other reviewers that his erudition tends to occlude direct engagement with the subject at hand. What I struggled with most was seeing the thread drawn between the subjects of angels, dreams, bodily resurrection, leading to the final sermon. This is all tough, heady stuff to contend with, and I’m not sure if it was me that was confounded, or Harold Bloom.

Dan Geddes says

Omens of Millennium attempted to show how contemporary manifestations of millennial longing—prophetic dreams, visions of angels, and “near-death” experiences—have their more “authentic” origins in the Gnostic traditions, whether Jewish, Christian, or Islamic.

Bloom posits that America is “obsessed” with angels, prophecies and other millennial omens, and that Americans are, ironically, Gnostic without knowing it. He trumpets Gnosticism as a more authentic tradition of images and beliefs than both the current New Agey claptrap and orthodox religion.

In fact, much of if not most of *Omens of Millenium* is a loose history of the salient images in the Gnostic traditions of Christian Gnosticism, Jewish Kabbalism, and Islamic Sufism. Normative Judaism, Christianity,

and Islam owe an immense debt to Zoroastrianism, which introduced the concepts of cosmic dualism (good vs. evil on a grand scale), the end-time, and the resurrection of the dead. These elements were lacking from pre-exile Judaism, but were accepted in time for the inter-testamental Jews (perhaps the same as the Essenes) to convey them to Christianity.

See more at <http://www.thesatirist.com/books/omen...>

Guillermojimenezespneo says

El Bloom profeta me parece más divertido que el supuesto y canónico crítico. Ya no leeré su canon novelero (al menos en la mala traducción del título), le faltan tantos y le sobran algunos. Ah, pero el casi profeta con su mezcla entre literaria e histórica, en sus descripciones de las religiones made in USA es enormemente disfrutable. Se aleja de las larguísimas inclusiones de las palabras, párrafos y etcéteras de a quienes revisa recomienda canoniza. No creo que Bloom me haya dicho algo diferente a los autores a quienes hemos leído. Si he leído con nuevos ojos las traducciones escritas y cinematográficas de Shakespeare pero hasta ahí. Me resultan amenos algunos decidores, Christopher por ejemplo, pero no tanto como para cambiar mi impresión escritural. Me continúa maravillando Bolaño, Borges, Aira y el largo etcétera de nuestros hispanoescritores o los nuevos desparpajados (Velázquez y demás). Esta incursión en las raíces del misticismo transicional, entre las religiones tradicionales y la nueva era (por llamarle de alguna manera) más allá de Scholem y los cabalistas y científicos me hace recordar los místicos transicionales del 19 al 20 con sus sesiones espiritistas, telepáticas y telekinéticas (aunque estas dos habilidades sí existen, son reales), y su rechazo al monoteísmo rígido, machista y retrógrado de las religiones mayores (por el número de practicantes, no por otra cosa). Erudición globosa, no más.

Mateus Pereira says

Bloom falando de suas experiências de quase morte e insistindo em Gnose e anjos. Divertido.

Terence Manleigh says

More religious criticism and theory from Harold Bloom. Things get quite mystical herein, and my eyes tend to glaze over when Bloom starts talking about gnosticism and the Kabbalah and the like... I prefer Bloom when he is focused on literature, but he is always, always fascinating and worth reading.

Philip Fracassi says

A definite must read for any Gnostic researcher, Bloom fanatic, or someone looking to expand the boundaries of what belief is and how religious thought is structured inside the human mind.

The amount of information doled out in this book is overwhelming every step of the way, like listening to a coffee-shop lecture about the history of the world (no name spared, no idea not turned over and dissected).

You will spend two weeks trying to get through the text, and twenty years researching all the information you just downloaded. It's an effort, and better done in doses, and I recommend scrupulous notes as you go. Because there are ideas here you won't want to forget.
