

The Life and Thought of Marjorie Reeves
(1905-2003)

Advocate for Humanist Scholarship and
Opponent of Utilitarian University Education:

An Edition of her unpublished Memoirs

With an Introduction by
Anthony Sheppard

In Memory of Edith Reeves,
Mother and Grandmother

Frontispiece and front cover: Marjorie Reeves in 1980, from a photo
by Hazel Rosotti.

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Foreword

Marjorie Reeves: A Personal Tribute

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After a lifetime of studying the influence of the Abbot Joachim, Marjorie Reeves wrote these memoirs.¹ In September 1989 when Joachim of Fiore's relics were brought back 'to their proper resting place in the crypt' of the restored Abbey in San Giovanni in Fiore, she began to wonder how, over the years, Joachim had 'once again become part of the people's memory' to the point at which his 'reputation . . . had come full circle'. 'A Sixty-Year Pilgrimage with the Abbot Joachim' dates the point of departure on her Joachimist pilgrimage to 1929, the year in which she began her Doctorate in the University of London.² When presented with the Freedom of the City by the Sindaco of San Giovanni in Fiore, she modestly reflected: 'I had helped to give them back "their" abbot' she wrote. 'History belongs to a wider fraternity than academics. It has "gone public".'³

Since coming down from Oxford in 1927 with her first class degree and a teacher-training qualification, she had begun independent

¹ I am deeply grateful to her nephew, Mr Robert Reeves, her literary executor, Madeleine Barber, and to David Smith, the librarian of St. Anne's College, Oxford, for the privilege of access to her papers.

² 'A Sixty-Year Pilgrimage with the Abbot Joachim', *Florensia: Bolletino del Centro Internazionale di Studi Gioachimiti* 6 (1992): 31.

³ I quote here from what is the last essay she saw into proof, entitled 'A Woman Historian in Oxford', written in 2001 and published in *Women Medievalists in the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 654, cited hereafter as 'A Woman Historian in Oxford'.

research in the British Museum Reading Room on 12th century Italian history before winning the scholarship that led to the PhD. It was there that she read Emile Gebhart's chapter on Joachim of Fiore in *L'Italie Mystique* (1890) as part of the background reading for a thesis she had projected on the Lombard commune in Brescia.⁴

Discovering the mysterious abbot was a moment of revelation.

“That’s what I am going to do!” I said to myself. It has taken the rest of my researching life to meet this demand. I have often reflected upon the mysterious processes by which scholars find their particular field of exploration. For some of us at least there is some kind of personal engagement even when we are still ignorant of what it is that excites us. It is a mysterious process, which Michael Polanyi has called ‘personal knowledge’ . . . unrepentantly, I stand with those who find history requires a commitment of the imagination as well as analytical skills . . .⁵

For Marjorie, history ‘is only explicable at its end’.⁶ Joachim, of course, remained at the very core of her mind. Yet, despite her astonishing unity of purpose in all of her intellectual fields, the quest for him occupies little of these Memoirs. In retrospect, however, certain details in her chapters on her childhood stand out. She wrote essays upon such subjects as ‘The Power of Influence’. The painting

⁴ Translated into English in 1922 by Edward Maslin Hume, Gebhart's book enjoyed a ‘surprising popularity in college libraries at the time’ according to Sir Richard Southern in his ‘Marjorie Reeves as an Historian’ in Ann Williams (ed.), *Prophecy and Millenarianism* (London: Longman, 1980), 4. Marjorie Reeves read the book in an undated French edition.

⁵ ‘A Woman Historian in Oxford’, 649.

⁶ A principle she consciously takes from Ubertino de Casale. In her unpublished ts., ‘Three Themes in the Literature of Persecuted Joachites’, 11, Reeves cites *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae* (Venice 1485), f. 235.

she chose to write on was G. F. Watts's 'Hope'. Dante joined Shakespeare among her favourite books, which included William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. This epic drama is an astonishing choice for a teenager, and in Marjorie's case it offered inspiration to one passionately concerned with *renovatio mundi*. In its third and fourth acts, 'all things . . . put their evil nature off', the 'painted veil' of perception is 'torn aside', and the consummation of history is achieved. Mankind emerges,

'free, uncircumscribed . . .
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise'. (Act III.iv: 190 et seq).

The 'new world of man' emerges from the 'melancholy ruins of cancelled cycles' (Act IV: 157, 288-9) and 'Hope creates | From its own wreck the thing it contemplates' (Act IV: 573-4).

If I stress the poetry that she loved rather than the history, it is not because she doesn't record that too. Her early interest lies in human action, her praise is for 'energy under restraint', and for the 'process of resurrecting people' rather than for the analysis of 'conflicting power forces': these ideas, she says, 'turned me on'. There is her sense of humour, which emerges in her realism. And, of course, the Bible:

'Perhaps it was this early playing about with Biblical texts that finally turned me towards medieval typology in the Bible — a theme which has absorbed my attention for many academic years. Yet here the old is always new' (p. 60 below).

Marjorie Reeves set out 'from a base I have never ceased to love' (p. 82, below) and went up to Oxford in 1923. Cecilia Ady tutored her

for the Dante special paper in the ‘sheer richness of the pictorial environment’ of her own house (full of Alinari prints of paintings from Renaissance Florence). It was, Marjorie records, ‘a turning point’.

‘Why should a Nonconformist, brought up to reject the whole idea of Purgatory, make such an odd choice? True, my Whitaker grandparents had a Victorian translation of the Divine Comedy with vivid engravings over which I pored. Perhaps this engendered some hidden curiosity which only surfaced much later. I have always been intrigued by the fact that a distinctive sense of worth-ness precedes the resolve to explore something as yet unknown. But a second question now arises in my mind: how did Dante find a place in a History School syllabus which was focused so strongly on British political and constitutional history?’(p. 92 below).

Dante led her to Joachim, who entirely displaced the plan to write on the Lombard Commune. Her London doctorate of 1932, ‘Studies in the Reputation and Influence of the Abbot Joachim of Fiore, chiefly in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries’ was not published as it stood, because Helen Waddell (author of *The Wandering Scholars*) advised against it (an intervention for which Marjorie was eternally grateful). The lines of that thesis remain clearly evident in the book where it eventually found published form: *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). The published book, however, omits the extraordinary preface to the thesis. ‘To treat the fantastic as history may well require explanation’ she had written:

‘Most of the prophetic material upon which these studies are based .

. . . is bizarre; it is fantastic; it seems, in itself, to be quite worthless.’⁷

Here, Marjorie implies something about the London climate in which she found herself. Though resident at the former Westfield College (Protestant, largely Nonconformist in character), she was supervised, at University College, that ‘godless institution in Gower Street’ (for thus it prided itself, and still does). Marjorie had been warned that Joachimism was a marginal topic: it would be a more certain career move to study the ‘Wardrobe (i.e., the king’s administration) under Edward II’.⁸ Instead, she chose the history of the ‘strange’, to use a favourite word of hers, of the ‘bizarre . . . the fantastic’.⁹

She was making history even as she wrote it. Looking back on the revolution in history writing since her undergraduate days she was able to write in 2001 ‘Not least the concern of the human mind with its own future is now seen as a part of history. Joachim as a major medieval prophet stands now in a prominent position on the historical stage.’¹⁰ Later, and with great modesty, she was to ‘wonder at [her] luck—rather than foresight’ in finding Edmund Garret Gardner as supervisor: willing to take her on, he was ‘about the only person’ in Britain ‘who knew anything about Joachim’, a ‘delightful supervisor who left me almost entirely alone to find my own way into the subject’.¹¹

⁷ ‘Studies in the Reputation and Influence of the Abbot Joachim of Fiore, chiefly in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries’, (PhD diss., London University, 1932), i.

⁸ ‘A Sixty-Year Pilgrimage with the Abbot Joachim’, 7-8.

⁹ Sir Richard Southern shrewdly notes that the preface vanished when the thesis was finally published in 1969. Fashions in history writing had changed, and what seemed recondite and fanciful in 1932 required no apology in 1969. (*Prophecy and Millenarianism*, 7-8).

¹⁰ ‘A Woman Historian in Oxford’, 650.

¹¹ ‘A Woman Historian in Oxford’, 649-50; also below, pp. 103-4.

Gardner, a Catholic, was well known in the UK as a Dante scholar and as the author of major studies of *Dante's Ten Heavens* and *Dukes and Poets in Ferrara* (1904). He had written on Joachim and the Eternal Evangel in 1912, and was deeply versed in Franciscan history.¹² His was one of two influential articles on the subject to have been published in English before she started work, and a third title appeared before her thesis was submitted.¹³ Lending her his own copy of the 1527 *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (there was not, at the time, a copy in the British Museum, which held the other early sixteenth century editions), he was himself a somewhat atypical figure at Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian college. The revolutionary nature, so far as English historical writing is concerned, of her thesis is found in the single question which 'opened for [her] an entirely new door into a 16th century world I had never suspected.'¹⁴ 'Brought up on the Burckhardt[ian] view that Renaissance Man represented a more or less complete break with the Middle Ages' she wrote elsewhere, 'I asked myself: Why should anyone in Renaissance Venice want to publish obscure writings of the 12th century?'¹⁵

¹² Records of his work and that of others in the field are in Greyfriars College, Oxford.

¹³ Anon.[i.e., A. T. S. Goodrick, acc. to Henry Bett, *Joachim of Flora* (London: Methuen 1931), 18], 'The Prophet of Calabria. Joachim of Floris [sic] and the "Eternal Gospel"', *Church Quarterly Review*, 65 (1907-8): 17-48; Edmund Gardner, 'Joachim of Flora and the Everlasting Gospel' in Paul Sabatier et al. (eds.), *Franciscan Studies* (Aberdeen 1912), 50-70. The third is Henry Bett's *Joachim of Flora*, esp. pp. 98-114.

¹⁴ 'A Woman Historian in Oxford', unpub. Ts 7 (the sentence cited does not appear in the published version); also below pp. 94 *et. seq.*

¹⁵ See p. 102 below. 'My undergraduate view of the Renaissance had been grounded on Jacob Burckhardt's great book, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance*' Marjorie Reeves wrote in 'A Sixty-Years Pilgrimage with the Abbot Joachim' (p. 9). These comments indicate something of the isolation of the Oxford History School from the profound influence of Walter Pater's anti-Burckhardtian *Studies in*

‘The episode’, she wrote, ‘highlights the extraordinary shift in the understanding of what constituted “proper history” between then and now. . . The roots of this striking shift of what constitutes history seem[] to me to lie deep in the cultural change taking place in the second half of the 20th century’ (pp. 103, 145 below).

The Regius Professor in the Oxford of her day, H. W. C. Davis, believed that ‘History’ was merely ‘past politics’. The ‘sea change in what constituted important history’ in the ‘latter half of the twentieth century’, was partly of her own doing.¹⁶ So pervasive now are the associated fields of the History of the Book, the History of Libraries and the History of Scholarship that it is easy to lose sight, in her modesty, of the originality of her approach in the late 1920s and 1930s. Yet she made the social and religious context of Renaissance editing, and what it tells us about the influence of prophecy in the Renaissance, her subject, and the history of scholarship and its influences became henceforth her subject, her discipline, the ground of all her work. Sir Richard Southern suggests that

‘[t]he Empire which informed so many of [Oxford History’s] presuppositions was visibly wobbling. That strangely Joachimite work, Spengler’s *Decline of the West* had recently been translated

the History of the Renaissance (1873), and especially of that work’s emphasis upon the the ‘medieval Renaissance [with] its antinomianism ... its outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of that assertion of the liberty of the heart’. For Pater, ‘that rebellion . . . comes to the surface’ in ‘the Franciscan order, with its poetry, its mysticism, its “illumination” . . . It influences the thought of those obscure prophetic writers, like Joachim of Flora, strange dreamers in a world of flowery rhetoric of that third and final dispensation of a “spirit of freedom” in which law shall have passed away.’ See Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: the 1893 Text* edited, with Textual and Explanatory Notes by Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 18-19.

¹⁶ Sir Richard Southern, ‘Marjorie Reeves as an Historian’, *Prophecy and Millenarianism*, 3.

into English, and though the book itself had no important influence, it expressed a new mood and it helped in a small way to open cracks in the historical structure. Young Miss Reeves at St. Hugh's seems to have felt these tremors more than her teachers.'¹⁷

She directed her attention to sorting out the genuine works of Joachim from the spurious. She saw that

'the Abbot's influence lived on far more through the medium of the spurious works than of the genuine. The Joachimism of the 16th century is undoubtedly debased; more than this, it has degenerated often into a current superstition which contains many other elements, and can be traced to no one source. Yet the leaven of the abbot's message works unmistakeably through this debased stuff, and the optimistic faith which is the distinctive mark of Joachimism, outcrops continually in 16th century prophecy.'¹⁸

With her focus firmly on the late and the decadent, her coverage of the mid-thirteenth century affair of the Eternal Evangel is summary. Gerardo de Borgo san Donnino is a 'strange Italian monk' who after only four years study, had 'stirred the University of Paris to its depths for a moment' in the mid 1250s.¹⁹

The force of the abbot's doctrine had been restricted by his humility of soul and obedience to authority, but his programme contained points that could be touched up and brought out with triumphant assertion. Ideas could be pushed to more striking conclusions, claims

¹⁷ Sir Richard Southern, 'Marjorie Reeves as an Historian', *Prophecy and Millenarianism*, 4.

¹⁸ 'Studies in the Reputation and Influence of the Abbot Joachim of Fiore, chiefly in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', p. iv.

¹⁹ 'Studies in the Reputation and Influence of the Abbot Joachim of Fiore, chiefly in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', 39 ff.

could be made more extravagantly, and above all parts could be allotted in the forthcoming drama of the sixth age. The system which resulted was a crude parody called Joachimism. ‘Arrogance . . . undoubtedly lay behind the assertion of Gerard [that] . . . that inspiration had wholly departed from the canon of Scriptures and had found a new temple in the Eternal Evangel of Joachim. This was the crudest absurdity to which Joachim’s speculation could be pushed, and it died a violent death at the hands of those who suddenly saw the danger implicit in such a system.’²⁰

Again, because her attention was in fact directed towards the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries she was not herself influenced by the later, wholly transformed current of Joachimist thought which had come to life as an intellectual tradition between Schelling and Ernest Renan. Marjorie had ‘found a home in Anglicanism’, but not before she ‘had been assured that making this move need not involve in any sense a repudiation of my religious heritage’ (p. 61 below). Though ‘bitten’ by the *intellectual* curiosity of the material that confronted her—unlike (say) Sylvia Townsend Warner or Isaak Dinesen or D. H. Lawrence—she was not ‘bitten’ by any contemporary glamour to be found in Joachim’s name. The genuine, the spurious, the orthodox, the heterodox, high traditions in the history of ideas and degenerate ones: these are the poles of her interests. To have held such contraries in a creative tension was new. To admit to the field of study the bizarre, the marginal and the fantastic, was, in its own way, a remarkably antinomian vision of history.

In her uncollected lectures and papers, Marjorie returned to the Eternal Evangel time and again. In 1964-5, at the Warburg Institute,

²⁰ ‘Studies in the Reputation and Influence of the Abbot Joachim of Fiore, chiefly in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries’, 41, 52.

she spoke alongside Arnaldo Momigliano, Frank Kermode, and Cyril Mango on the theme of ‘Myth and History’,²¹ taking as her theme ‘The Abbot Joachim: His Myth of New Spiritual Orders’. Explaining Joachimist meanings of history to a Warburg audience, she naturally reaches for Joachim’s typology, citing the great Trinitarian ‘lyrical outburst’, as she calls it, from the *Liber Concordie*:

‘The first status was in slavery, the second in filial service, the third will be in liberty; the first in fear, the second in faith, the third in love. The first belonged to old men, the second to young men, the third will belong to boys. The first was by starlight, the second in the dawn; the third will be in full sunlight. The first was winter, the second spring, the third will be high summer. The first brought forth nettles, the second roses, the third will bring lilies; the first water, the second wine, the third oil.’

‘Small wonder’, she remarked ‘that from these images a myth of the future was created’.²² It is here that Marjorie defines the antinomian vision in terms of the ‘[d]rive to seek within history the key to human destiny and then to turn this into a revolutionary faith is (*sic*) common to many ages’.²³

The same great passage is at the heart of ‘Myths of the Future’, another undated lecture, which covers some of the same ground, from

²¹ The Warburg is another of the University of London institutions which had great impact on her work, and a famous generation of Warburg scholars such as Fritz Saxl helped and influenced her. Her work on the *Liber Figurarum* with Beatrice Hirsch-Reich she has characterised as ‘an odd combination of Jewish-born spirituality and Anglo-Saxon matter-of-factness’, and it was, in the end, eventually published after Dr Hirsch-Reich’s death in the Oxford-Warburg Series as *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore*, 1972.

²² ‘Three Themes in the Literature of Persecuted Joachites’, Unpublished Ts., 13.

²³ ‘The Abbot Joachim: his Myth of New Spiritual Orders’, Unpublished Ts, 1.

Gerardo through various examples of the ‘pathetic witness of simple people speaking before the Inquisition of their expectation that the fire of the Spirit was about to descend once more’.²⁴ ‘Three Themes in the Literature of Persecuted Joachites’ takes up the idea from her thesis that the affair of the Eternal Evangel is a ‘parody’ of Joachim.

‘The outstanding impression left on reading through their document [of the Papal Commission of Anagni] is that the full force of Joachim’s doctrine of history had suddenly burst upon them. They saw Gerard’s work in the context of the full Trinitarian meaning of history as expounded by Joachim, quoting many of his famous sequences of threes. . . . They grasped the point that in fanatical hands this became a claim to supersede all other authorities and to arrogate to oneself the final saving role. . . . And they were horrified.’²⁵

In all these lectures, she conducts her enquiries into what it is to read, or reread, the lofty and resolutely symbolical by the light of the degenerate and interested, or the complex in the raking light of the crudely oversimplified, the reductive, or the foreshortened. She always envisages the text in relation to its intended audience. Such a complex vision involves holding in a single thought Doctrine and its Parody, Heterodoxy and Orthodoxy, the Genuine and the Spurious, whilst mapping the hidden roads that lead from misreading to misreading.

Oscar Wilde saw that to display such capabilities as Marjorie does in respect of the true and the false is to display an inherently antinomian vision.²⁶ The rhetorical strategies of the passage I just quoted from

²⁴ ‘Myths of the Future’, Unpublished Ts., 2-3.

²⁵ ‘Three Themes in the Literature of Persecuted Joachites’, 3.

²⁶ Seeing the nineteenth century as ‘a turning point in history, simply on account of

the *Liber Concordie* were shrewdly used in Gerardo de Borgo San Donnino's falsification by condensation, or arrogant misappropriation, of Joachim's position.

Renan was the vector whereby a thirteenth century heresy made its direct and unmediated impact on nineteenth century English sensibilities. His typical audience had no access to black-letter Latin, let alone to the manuscripts he patiently transcribed or listed from the Mazarine Library and elsewhere. Structures of myth available to comparative religionists and students of the classical tradition at the Warburg 100 years later were not part of the mental furniture of those Renan addressed. His audiences in both France and the UK were caught in the ebb and flow of large issues of faith and doubt: Oscar Wilde spoke for them when he called Renan's *Vie de Jésus*—'that gracious Fifth Gospel, the Gospel according to St Thomas'.²⁷

Such an audience, however, could readily relate to the poetry of prophecy, to the romantic vision, say, of Percy Bysshe Shelley whose *Prometheus Unbound*, as we have seen, had been among Marjorie's favourite schoolgirl reading. Shelley had written, both in his *Philosophical View of Reform* and in his *Defence of Poetry*, of the poet as *vates*. For Shelley the connexion between poetry and prophecy was undoubtedly bound up with the extent to which the

the work of two men, Darwin and Renan, the one the critic of the Book of Nature, the other the critic of the books of God', Wilde considered that the 'artistic critic, like the mystic, is an antinomian always' and that 'all ideas' are 'dangerous'. He saw himself as standing 'in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age . . . to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. . . I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws'. See *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), 1154, 1017, 1019.

²⁷ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 1029.

emergent myths of prophets could help people make sense of their lives in the light of futurity. Gesturing to Revelation 1.3-18, he insisted that ‘Poets were the unacknowledged legislators of the World’.²⁸

In the summer of 1971 I sought her help, having read *The Influence of Prophecy*. There was no one in London, where I was a postgraduate student, and particularly not in my discipline of English Literature, who could help me with my problem, which was that of what seemed to me to be the survival into the nineteenth century, of a strong and vital current of Joachimist thinking in some shape or form, which, rightly or wrongly, identified itself under the banner ‘Eternal Evangel’. It was a subject too big for me to handle, largely because I had a specific and narrow purpose in entering that field. I was editing the occult fiction of the Irish poet W. B. Yeats. His ‘The Tables of the Law’ was a story of astonishing brilliance, one of a triptych much admired by other writers of the period and apparently learned off by heart by the young James Joyce.

The story dates from 1896, and it turns upon a Joachimist theme. A spoiled priest in Dublin at the end of the nineteenth century has what purports to be the sole surviving MS copy of what is here called the *Liber Inducens in Evangelium Aeternum* to have escaped the flames after Alexander IV has ordered the book to be destroyed. Gerardo de Borgo San Donnino and the ‘more extreme Franciscans’ are hinted at, but the doctrine of the Eternal Evangel is taken as a genuinely Joachimist doctrine, written and taught in secret, and the three parts of the *Liber Inducens* contain the message ‘in which the freedom of

²⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘A Defence of Poetry’, with interpolated words from the reuse of the passage in ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’, quoted from *Peacock’s Four Ages of Poetry; Shelley’s Defence of Poetry; Browning’s Essay on Shelley* ed. H. F. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), 59.

the Renaissance lay hidden'. Yeats gives to the MS a most fabulous provenance, allowing it to have passed through the hands of poets and artists who have decorated it. Giulio Clovio, Benvenuto Cellini, Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Aretino are drawn into its ambience. In Aherne's view, its doctrine has swept the commandments of the Father and Son away and replaces them with the 'commandments of the Holy Spirit'. This sacred book thus turns into a pestiferous book.²⁹

Miraculously, *The Influence of Prophecy* had just been published. I wrote to Marjorie. She had not heard of Yeats's story. She was surprised at its revolutionary and political implications, though long familiar with the phenomenon whereby Joachim had been harnessed as a 'spiritual horse' to some very 'temporal chariots'. She was intrigued by its mixture of recondite and genuine reference. I went down to Oxford to meet her on 15 June 1971. She had not long retired, and was kind, helpful, and most searching. She showed me her copy of the *Expositio* (at the time still not in the British Museum), offered lines of enquiry and, deep in the preparation of *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* which appeared in the following year, she implored me to think of Joachim as an artist.

I do not often keep a record of such encounters, but on this occasion I did make an all too brief note. Looking over that note now, I am struck by Marjorie's practical interest in how one might use Yeats's obvious mistakes (as distinct from his invention) to track further his sources. Renan to her was a wholly superseded critic. The transition which Yeats fashions from sacred book to fatal book was masterly,

²⁹ W. B. Yeats, *The Secret Rose: Stories by W. B. Yeats: A Variorum Edition*, edited by Warwick Gould, Phillip L. Marcus and Michael J. Sidnell (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 150-64.

but its generic assuredness suggested that it relied upon both a literary tradition and a tradition in the history of ideas, indeed, in ideas modern enough to have communicated themselves vividly to an Irish poet with ‘small Latin’ and less French. Eventually I saw that this tradition led back to George Sand, and via Renan.

I was presenting Marjorie with further evidence of a current of slipshod knowledge, if also of lofty allusion, in nineteenth century thought. Very familiar rhetorical strategies were at work, but in the very different climates of 18th, 19th, and even 20th century intellectual (as distinct from religious) history. We may have been tracking the same obsessive idea, but in my field it was a task for which she was, in truth, over-qualified. Generous as she was, it struck me as strange that she seemed impervious to the Joachimist voltage in Renan to whom creative writers had looked for a current of fresh modern ideas.

There matters rested. My own work led in other directions: I had no vehicle for the increasingly bulky files of Joachimist allusion I was building up. It was some years between our first meeting in the summer of 1971 and the moment at which she decided to bring the story of Joachimism down to more modern times. As she tells the story in the acknowledgements to *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth Century*, it was Norman Cohn, author of *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, who reminded her ‘Did you know that George Sand wrote a story about Joachim?’³⁰ In her ‘Sixty-Year Pilgrimage’ she dates this encounter to 1978. From that moment on, she began to fill in the tradition from the end of the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth. In the course of this work,

³⁰ *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon 1987), p. v.

she sought me out, and kindly invited me to collaborate. From then on, we were like two people digging towards each other from opposite ends of a tunnel. Our meeting point was in George Sand's *Spiridion*, and working on that novel clarified how a tradition of thought led very clearly to Wilde, Yeats and Joyce via Pierre Leroux, who had added the new Joachimist chapter to the later edition of *Spiridion* (1838, 1842), Renan, Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold.³¹

Marjorie had worked on Mazzini, Pierre Leroux, Edgar Quinet, and done it with great intellectual excitement. She was, in her phrase, 'turned on' by the chase, and in mine, now fully 'tuned in' to the way in which the 'Eternal Evangel' was no less obsessive a force in the history of ideas (as distinct from the history of sects and heresies) for being largely metaphorical. Though she did not share Renan's crisis of belief, she was no longer impervious to his voltage of spiritual regret, and certainly empathized with his spiritual hope and passion for futurity. She read and reread every essay of Ernest Renan's I could dig out for her, as we sought not only to track every reference he made to Joachim and to George Sand,³² but also to read him on the future of religion, on the future of science and many other topics. He had said:

'We will abstain from inquiring whether, in our days, Joachim could still claim any legitimate successors.'³³ To preserve the exact meaning

³¹ On which see Gould and Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Rev. Ed. 2001, 109-15.

³² Especially, e.g., in such works as *L'Avenir Religieux des Sociétés Modernes*; *L'Avenir de la Science*, etc.: see Gould and Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 150-61.

³³ 'We must not, however, forget the beautiful romance *Spiridion*, in which Joachim's figure was skilfully drawn and brought into the picture with marvellous art. On this point Madame Sand owed much to M. Pierre Leroux.' The footnote is Renan's.

of the words “Eternal Gospel”, they should be applied solely to the first phase of that vast movement, the centre of which is the Order of St. Francis, and which gave rise to such curious popular aberrations. Such as it is, despite its faults and its failure, that endeavour is nevertheless the boldest attempt at religious creation made in modern times; and it would have changed the face of the world, had not its progress been arrested by the disciplined intelligence of the thirteenth century.’³⁴

This was a passage she had copied out, in both French and English, on separate occasions, before and during our work. In his emphasis on the ‘disciplined intelligence’, Renan rather mysteriously withholds the words ‘Eternal Evangel’ from modern application: somewhat, one suspects, in self-defence, but there is no doubt that he endorses the ‘grand instinct of futurity’ which had been his point of departure.³⁵

Working with her on *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel* (1987) and revising it for its two subsequent editions (2000, 2001), I became aware how important it had been for her to place herself, and her own spiritual journey to high Anglicanism, within the intellectual traditions of Joachimist influence from Lessing to the early twentieth century. For all her profound love of medieval mystical thought and its influence, there was, in the later ‘intellectualization’ of that influence, something that spoke very deeply to her own religious quest, and explained both their origins and development. Marjorie would refer to herself as a Joachite. The

³⁴ *Studies in Religious History*, 303-4.

³⁵ ‘The fundamental idea of Christianity at its birth was faith in the coming inauguration of the kingdom of God, which would renew the world and establish in it the everlasting felicity of saints. . . This grand instinct of the future has been the strength of Christianity, the secret of its ever-renewed youth’ (*Studies in Religious History*, 211-2).

Eternal Evangel had a private meaning for her, as a wholly personal myth of the ways by which hope, progress and futurity might find meaning in history to complete the incomplete, and thus give meaning to an individual life in progress. It was, of course, remote from (indeed, contrary to) the meaning and the occasion which had given notoriety to the term. After all, like anybody else, she had independent access to that mysterious term from the Book of Revelations. The Lambeth *Apocalypse* image we chose for the third edition of the book shows earnest discussion of an apparently blank scroll, apt emblem of the potency of potentiality, and so of the making of meaning by beholders of mysteries.³⁶

She had noted in her thesis that, however ‘alien’ Gerardo’s thinking was from the discipline of Joachim, especially in its ‘violence of tone’, his followers were, after all, ‘giving definition to the new authority which they felt must exist on the new plane of life’, and seeking, as we all must, to ‘reconstruct an ordered life for the third state’ in our apprehension of the future.³⁷ An imaginative view of the possibilities of the future was necessary to her, its ‘romanticism’ none the less real for being acknowledged, channelled, disciplined. It is thus, I think, that she came to see that the Middle Ages did not, after all, end in the 17th century. Joachimist influence persisted down to our own day. As the Eternal Evangel lost its literal urgency, it became a no less compelling intellectual force as a metaphor for the urgency of change, a hope principle, an expression of the potential of futurity in the present, as in Renan’s ‘grand instinct d’avenir’.

Profoundly restless, profoundly Christian, that instinct motivated her

³⁶ Lambeth Palace Library, MS 209, f. 22.

³⁷ ‘Studies in the Reputation and Influence of the Abbot Joachim of Fiore, chiefly in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries’, 54-56.

religious quest, her long life and her great work in so many other fields. Growing out of her studies of the originality and influence of Joachimism, not only in the later Middle Ages, but in the background debates which impinge on her own religious traditions, and on biblical modernism itself, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Marjorie's 'Eternal Evangel', deriving the future out of the past, and seeing in prophecy some of the best directions for humanity, eventually articulated itself in the book we wrote together in 1987. As she saw it, the protean nineteenth century 'religion of humanity' grew from some kind of divine discontent within Christianity itself, a discontent with dogma, with the forms of established churches, a progressive discontent. In such matters she revealed a patient understanding of, sympathy with, and pity for, sectaries, and a profound respect for the necessity of distinguishing between the particular and local reasons for various instances of recurrent phenomena.

Marjorie was a proud inheritor of the Eternal Evangel, her selflessness and objectivity offering a rigour of thought to balance her sympathy for the origins of prophetic thought even when grounded in heresy. Her grand instinct of futurity was no simple principle of hope, but a constructive vision of human perfectibility drawn from the Joachimist tradition, an imperative of expectation and responsibility which infuses all of her work in many fields beyond Joachimist studies. She was uniquely qualified to recover from the past some sense of how its predicaments are ceaselessly recreated by the modern spirit. She was too selfless a teacher, too busy, too dedicated, too objective in purpose and outlook, to imagine that such a private matter would be of wider interest, but like T. S. Eliot, she knew what it was to arrive back where she started from, 'and to know

the place for the first time'.³⁸

I feel some trepidation in externalising such thoughts now that I would scarcely have ventured to articulate in her lifetime. Our working relationship was a professional one. Yet it is not possible for two people to work on such a subject as Joachim of Fiore without some frankness as to one's personal beliefs, especially when one's topic is the nature of the influence of such a thinker on the history of ideas, and when one is an agnostic, the other a committed Christian. 'No historical questions' says Ernest Renan, 'are more difficult to solve than those which aim at discovering in the past qualities created by the spirit of the present'.³⁹

As claims for Joachimist 'influence' flourished in the wake of her 1969 book, Marjorie Reeves became more and more concerned to establish rigorous tests for such claims which were devised at the very moment at which 'Influence' itself was in the air, an astral preoccupation if not a disease, truly an inescapable part of the *zeitgeist*, as it were. That mood in which the nature of influence itself was questioned was undoubtedly salutary, but it passed.

These tests were, of course, of Marjorie's devising. I have always felt that her rigorous criteria for Joachimist influence are a great expression of her scholarly wisdom, one that she has devised for the benefit of future generations of scholars, along with her boundless awareness of how inexhaustible a subject Joachimism remains. Even so, Marjorie was conscious of just how dubious the privilege of scepticism can be in the face of enthusiasm. Her tests were themselves put to the test when, in 2001, we able to revise our book

³⁸ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 'Little Gidding,' part V.

³⁹ Renan, *Studies in Religious History*, 248.

yet again, in part to correct and expand what we had done in 1987, to take on board new discoveries, such as those of Fulvio de Giorgi in respect of Mazzini first conveyed in the preface to *Giacchino da Fiore et il Mito dell'Evangelo eterno nella cultura europea* (2000). Our principal reason for expanding the book, however, was to place on record our scepticism in the face of specious and counterfactual claims massing themselves in opportunistic books launched on the wave of the millennium.

Frank Kermode had called our 1987 edition, *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth Century*, a 'map': we were heavily aware of the limits of our conjecture, especially when our map led into territories beyond our linguistic competencies.

She was so proud of being granted the Freedom of San Giovanni in Fiore. After her first visit there in 1950, she returned in 1979 and 1984, and again in 1989 for the full-scale *translatio* of Joachim's bones to the crypt of the Abbey and its reconsecration, and yet again in 1994. She measured the progress by which 'Joachim . . . [has] at last been cleared of his semi-heretical status and brought home.'⁴⁰ A local cult manoeuvred for his canonisation, but the Pope is adamant. In 2008 an internet claim, presumably a hoax, alleged for a campaign speech of Barack Obama's three sources in Joachim's writings. A Vatican spokesman's swift response emphasised the heretical nature of Joachim's writings.

At her funeral, her parish priest, Canon Mountford, spoke of how she read the Biblical narrative of Jacob wrestling with the angel as a type of the intellectual life, and it seems to me that she, like Jacob, was blessed on account of her persistence. In that progress, the 'Eternal

⁴⁰ 'A Woman Historian in Oxford', 654.

Evangel' had become for Marjorie Reeves a personal *credo*, a shorthand code for the 'true inspiration of action', for travelling hopefully, for hard work, and above all, for her constant witness for truth. She wrote in her last essay that, 'Once a fellow historian said to me (in joke): "If you get to heaven and find the Abbot Joachim and his disciples gathered in a special corner for Joachimites waiting for you, will you be able to look him in the face?". The idea took me aback. The only possible response would be: "I tried to be as truthful as possible". This surely goes for all of us.'⁴¹

⁴¹ 'A Woman Historian in Oxford', 654-5.

