

The Theologian in the Attic: Jonathan Edwards and American Culture

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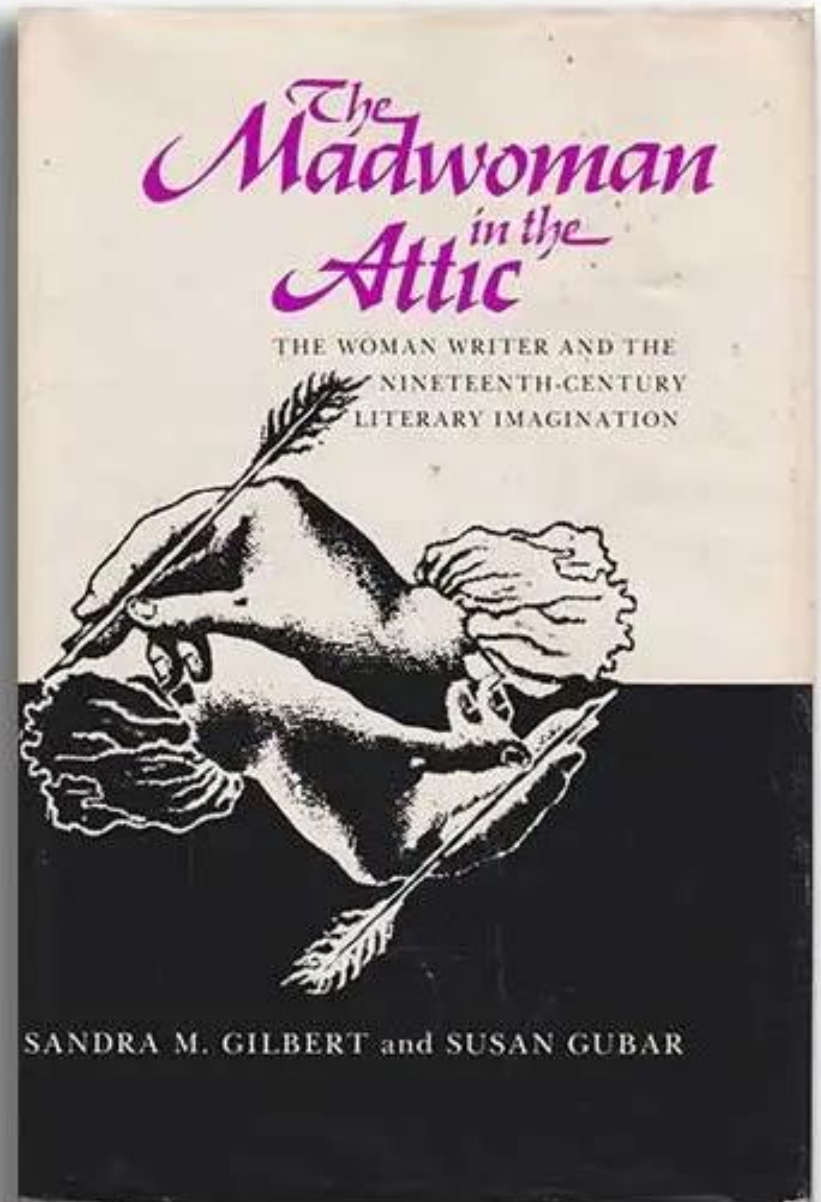
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Institute for the Study of Religion, 2024 International Conference:
Jonathan Edwards and Bernard Lonergan on Religion(s) in East
Asia: Towards a Dialogic Human Dignity

December 20, 2024

Up in the Attic

- Henry May: “Why you? You don’t know all that much about Edwards” “Maybe that is *why*...”
- The lesson from Sandra J. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*: look for figures who are hidden, half-forgotten, but always present
- And perhaps recovered from the attic at a propitious moment



Sidebar: What is American Culture

- Two streams of American Culture research:
- Dominant in the 1920s: American exceptionalism
- Dominant starting in the 1940s and 1950s: America a progenitor of global culture that then will continue to interact with it
- Today's presentation follows the second stream



Jonathan Edwards in the Eighteenth Century

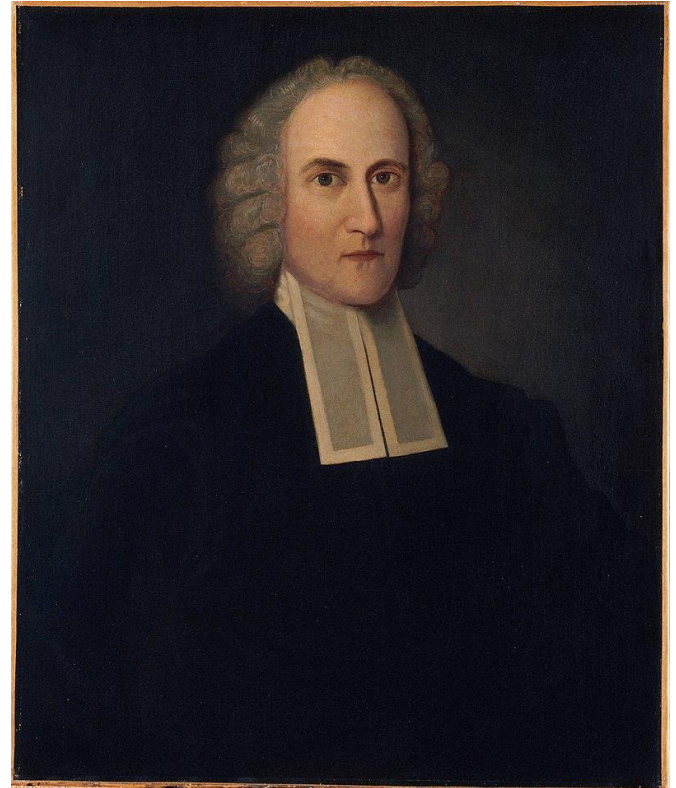
From a precocious child in love with nature, God, and modern philosophy

To dynamic revival preacher and failed pastor

To theological giant

A controversialist with a shining face

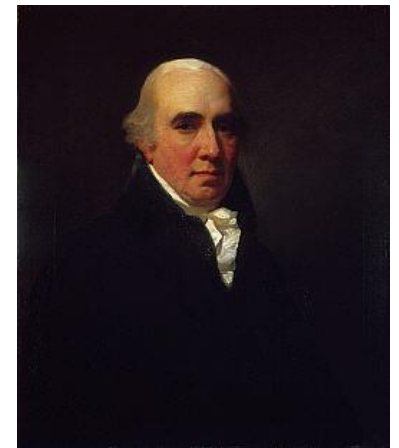
But by 1800 dismissed as the author of “the rubbish of libraries” (Ezra Stiles)



Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards in the Nineteenth Century: Retrofitting a Theologian

- Garbled accounts of the squabble at Northampton reach Germany by the 1840s (Heinrich Ewald)
- Four reasons for interest in Edwards in the 19th century:
- Disputes among denominational theologians on the meaning of the Great Awakening
- Surge of interest in free will and necessity - Edwards seen as “the most celebrated, and indisputably the ablest champion, in later times, of the scheme of necessity” (Dugald Stewart)
- Publication of “Notes” in 1830 opens new insight on Edwards’s “idealism”



Left, Sir James Mackintosh (1765-1832); right, Dugald Stewart (1753-1828)

Jonathan Edwards in the Nineteenth Century: Awakenings

- And reckoning with the original Great Awakening amid the Second Great Awakening
- Joseph Tracy *The Great Awakening* (1842) brings Edwards center stage
- But how was the Second Awakening different from the first? Focus on family-oriented human love rather than Edwards's divine Love
- Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing* (1859): "refined poetry of torture," "Oh! Mr. Edwards! Mr. Edwards! Is God not a God of mercy?"
- "Edwards' God shines red and hideous in the glow from the fires of hell" (Mark Twain)



"The Comforter," illustration by Phiz for Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing* (1859)

Jonathan Edwards and American Studies: The Parrington Years

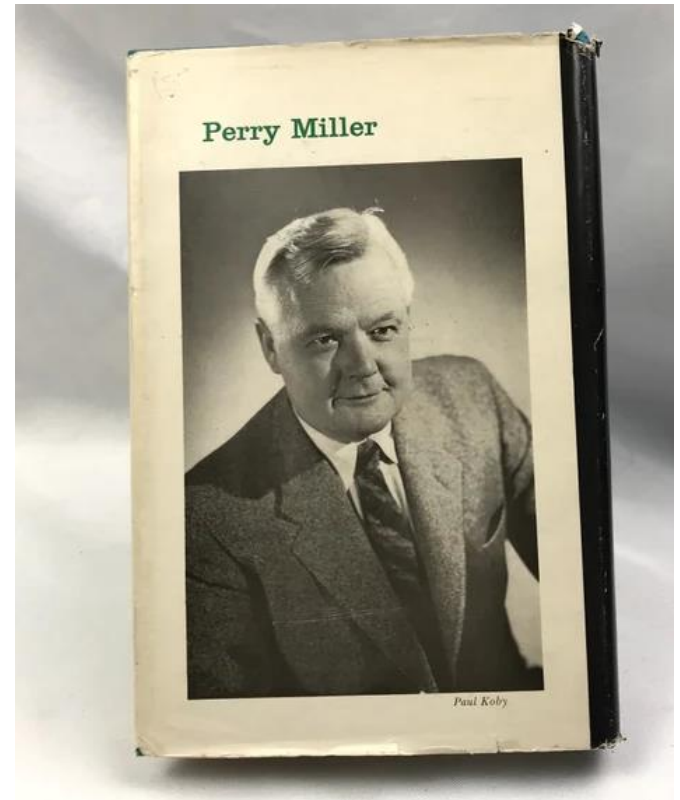
- The backlash grows with questions of American identity
- Vernon L. Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) focuses on “the anachronism of Jonathan Edwards”: Edwards's greatest service was to doom Calvinism by putting it on display
- Henry Parkes's *Jonathan Edwards: The Fiery Puritan* (1930) calls his subject's writings a “blight upon posterity,” and Edwards himself “not truly an American”



Vernon L. Parrington (1871-1929)

Jonathan Edwards and American Studies: The Perry Miller Years

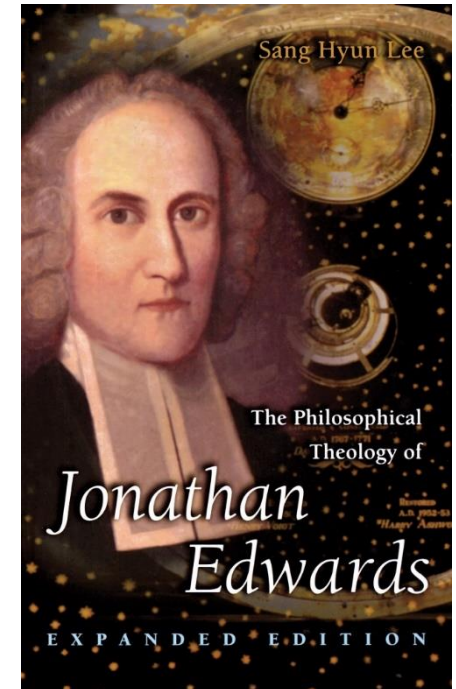
- Perry Miller game-changer?
- Neo-orthodox Protestants (H. Richard Niebuhr, etc.) already focusing on Edwards in the 1930s
- Miller had similarities to Parrington mindset, except he incorrectly saw Edwards as o'erleaping Calvinism to modernity
- But Miller took Edwards seriously, engaged readers, and launched the 16,800 pages of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*



Perry Miller (1905-1963)

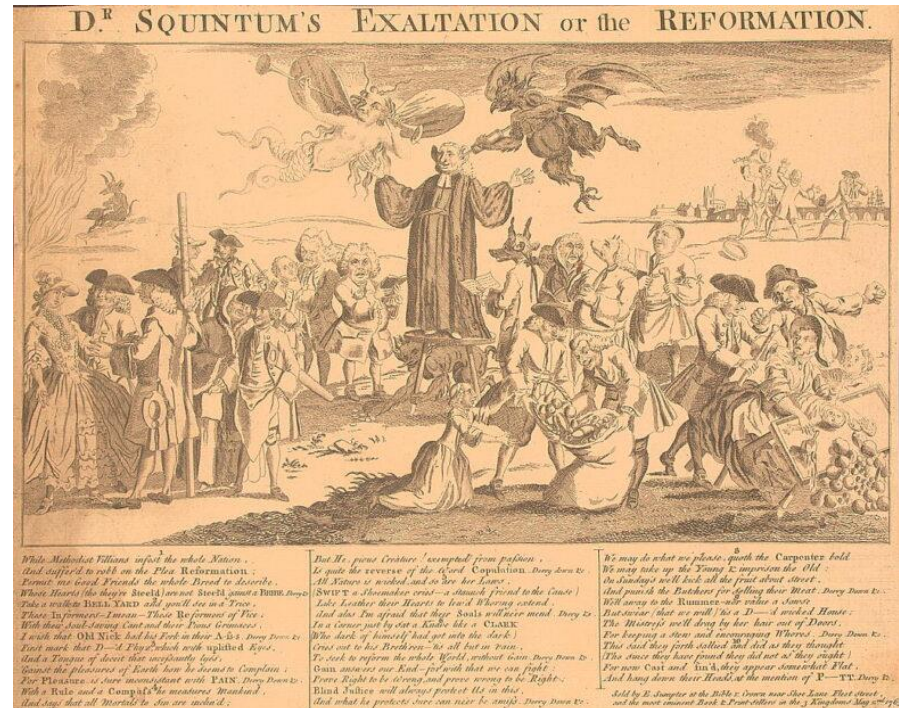
Jonathan Edwards Moves Out of the Attic

- Different trajectories for two Princeton presidents
- Modern theologians actualizing impressions that earlier readers adumbrated
- “Not only, ‘Why was Edwards great?’ but ‘Was Edwards right?’ One may ask not only, ‘Was Edwards right’ but ‘Is he?’” (Robert W. Jenson)
- Two streams: institutional denominations investigating post-1750 theology, evangelicals focusing on Edwards as revivalist and psychologist



Open Questions

- Newton, Edwards, and an interventionist God
- Edwards as “enthusiast”?
- Jonathan and Sarah Edwards encounters with the Holy Spirit
- MIA among non-evangelical historians and theologians: The Great Awakening



A 1763 English cartoon mocking the social convulsions associated with the revival meetings of the cross-eyed George Whitefield (hence “Dr. Squintum”)

Knowing, and Using, Jonathan Edwards

- What if Edwards scholarship got Real?
- Overflowing divine love linking Edwards with Transcendentalists, William James, etc.
- Edwards and the necessity to verbalize communications



Thank You!

And have a great
holiday!

