

**Review: *A Collection of Ranter Writings from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* edited by Nigel Smith (London: Junction Books 1983)**

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The Ranters, an anarchistic group who flourished briefly on the extreme left wing of the seventeenth century English Revolution, theorised in the tradition of antinomian apocalypse. The motif of apocalypse appears when Abiezer Coppe, perhaps the most striking figure amongst them, declares 'It's the last daies'. The motif of antinomianism is signalled in his conviction that 'yet I can if it be my will, kisse and hug Ladies, and love my neighbours wife as my selfe, without sin'. In addition, Coppe advocates communism, defends swearing – at any rate, 'swearing i'th light, gloriously' – and prefigures the surrealism of the early Georges Bataille with his announcement that 'God has CHOSEN...BASE things'.

Nigel Smith's splendid edition of Ranter writings covers the whole range of their politics and theology and shows the movement developing (and declining) over time. He preserves the Ranters' highly distinctive spelling and orthography and has produced a volume which offers not merely a consolidation of historians such as A.L. Morton and Christopher Hill but also a fascinating and exhilarating read.

No revolution worthy of the name can be without its strand of Ranterism. The Ranters themselves would have unhesitatingly endorsed Emma Goldmann's festive motto: 'I don't want your revolution if I can't dance'.