Robert Glenn Howard (ed.)


John Walliss and Lee Quinby (eds.)


These volumes, both part of the recently introduced Apocalypse and Popular Culture series from Sheffield Phoenix Press, demonstrate anew the complex ways that apocalyptic thinking and imagery shape modern popular culture. While both address some of the most recent manifestations of apocalyptic narrative and thinking, the volumes present distinct approaches and address unique sets of material. As the title suggests, the essays in Reel Revelations: Apocalypse and Film, edited by John Walliss and Lee Quinby, focus primarily upon the connections between apocalyptic literature and film. Almost all of the contributors work within the field of religious studies, and most of the essays engage scholarly conversations about the genre of apocalypse and the characteristics of apocalyptic literature. The essays address how films appropriate and reinterpret apocalyptic elements, as well as exploring how some films function similarly to apocalyptic literature. Network Apocalypse: Visions of the End in an Age of Internet Media, edited by Robert Glenn Howard, includes contributors from a variety of fields, including communication arts, sociology, English, etc. As a whole the volume prompts its readers to think about the various ways that internet technologies foster apocalypticism around the globe.

Most of the essays included in Reel Revelations offer close readings of particular films or genres of film. These essays generally move past pointing out allusions to apocalyptic texts and traditions in order to explore either how these films function in ways that are similar to apocalyptic texts or how specific films might be used to reread Revelation. Kim Paffenroth’s essay on the modern zombie films of George Romero, “Apocalyptic Images and Prophetic Function in Zombie Films,” provides a good example of the former. After a helpful introduction to modern zombie traditions, Paffenroth argues that modern zombie films function similarly to ancient prophetic and apocalyptic texts by revealing truth and judgment. Paffenroth writes, “But since zombies look exactly like human beings, their cannibalism also brings out the image of humanity preying on itself – the self-destructive and sadistic elements of all people, which have been seen on the killing fields all across the ‘real’ world even without a zombie virus to excuse the behavior” (8). Like their ancient predecessors, these films warn the audience about the dangers inherent within...
their behaviors. Like Paffenorth’s essay, Lee Quinby’s essay, “Southland Tales, The Film of Revelation: Richard Kelly’s Satire of American Apocalypse,” explores how a film functions similarly to an apocalypse. As Quinby explains, while Southland Tales explicitly draws upon the Book of Revelation, the film received limited attention even among those who study Revelation and apocalyptic literature. Quinby convincingly argues that the film warrants a second look since it mimics Revelation’s critique of and subsequent call to enter empire, “showing instead how that impulse has for too long traumatized the body politic” (26). Frances Flannery offers a close reading of the film Serenity in her relatively short essay “Post-modern Apocalypse and Terrorism in Joss Whedon’s Serenity.” Flannery discusses this film, a conclusion to the short-lived sci-fi television series, as a secular reworking of the genre apocalypse in which blind faith, fundamentalism, and conformity are criticized. Greg Garrett’s essay takes a different approach, highlighting how a particular image important to traditional apocalyptic texts is reworked within contemporary contexts. In particular, Garrett explores variations on apocalyptic “son of man” imagery in a number of contemporary films, including the Matrix series, Terminator, and Signs. In the concluding essay of the volume, “More than Meets the Eye: Apocalypse Transformed in the Transformers,” Elizabeth Rosen examines how a number of recent films, especially Transformers, challenge apocalyptic dualism, favoring multiple meanings and rejecting absolutes. Interestingly, within this essay Rosen offers a brief discussion of apocalyptic themes in children's films, such as WALL-E, which seems worthy of a separate essay. Jon R. Stone’s “Apocalyptic Fiction: Revelatory Elements with Post-War American Films” is less focused than the others, summarizing the different ways that secular apocalyptic films imagine the end. Even though this essay is an update of an earlier piece by Stone, the films discussed tend to be less recent than the films discussed elsewhere in this volume.

The essays by Mary Ann Beavis, John Walliss, and Richard Walsh approach apocalyptic film from slightly different angles. In “Pseudapocrypha: Invented Scripture in Apocalyptic Horror Films,” Beavis examines how apocalyptic horror movies such as Carrie, The Omen III, and the series The Prophecy I-V construct apocalyptic and eschatological “pseudoapocrypha.” While these secular films echo actual apocalyptic texts and traditions, they “invent supernatural conspiracies, eschatological actors and theological loopholes” in constructing an apocalyptic plot line (79). Beavis argues that these films mediate between the biblical literalism of Christian doomsday films and apocalyptic films that completely demythologize the end of the world, imagining the end in terms of ecological disaster, nuclear war, etc. She suggests that this seeming respect for