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REVIEWS**

Edited by Eleanor Beal & Jonathan Greenaway, *Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019. 224pp, cloth. £45.00.

From a wider societal perspective, horror and religion might appear to be strange bedfellows, with theology often being perceived as dealing in moral absolutes while appeals to morality can usually be found within any cultural panics regarding on-screen violence. Many of the moral panics and criticisms of the horror genre's supposed negative impact upon culture involve at least some degree of religious motivation. In such situations, horror fiction is positioned as the enemy of religious commentators, with a 'fondness for violence, illicit or non-normative sexualities and heterodox spiritual belief' (Beal & Greenaway, 2019: 2). Eleanor Beal and Jonathan Greenaway recognise and address this conflict from the very start, their introduction noting the 'outcast' nature of the genre within British and American literature. This status as the black sheep of fiction goes beyond literature, and into film, television, and comics, where the genre has also provoked outrage, claims of sensationalism, and of causing the moral decline of society.

Yet horror scholars from across different disciplines have attested to the genre's effectiveness in dealing with cultural fears, and the nature of evil itself, frequently drawing on psychoanalytical theory. Beal and Greenaway argue that despite the 'tradition of suspicion' towards the genre, its 'persuasive popularity and... engagement with religious themes has remained (2019: 4). The persistence of these themes, they argue, means a theological approach can be just as effective as a psychoanalytical one, whilst they also raise the question how exactly the notion of 'theology' should be defined. They draw on the work of Graham Ward and 'his definition of theology as the speaking of the God who is believed in' and argue that contemporary horror fiction is centred around 'tensions between secular modernity and the still persisting religious impulse' (2019: 4-5). Theology is as varied in its interpretations and iterations as the horror genre itself is, a strength that allows for the wide variety of approaches and ideas explored in 'Horror and Religion'. Focusing on race and sexuality, two areas often highlighted in horror, this is a timely book that will interest academics and teachers alike.

The book opens with perhaps one of its most important chapters, one with relevance not only in literary studies but across many creative disciplines. Neil Syme's chapter entitled 'Headlong into an Immense Abyss', an appropriate moniker for the book's first entry, explores the influence of Calvinism in American horror. This influence stems most notably to the works of H. P. Lovecraft, himself considered one of the most influential horror authors of the twentieth century. Syme draws links between Calvinistic theology which implies a God that is 'uncaring, unfathomable and effectively inhuman or alien' and the Cthulhu Mythos of Lovecraft (2019: 17). The chapter draws on other horror writers and fiction including the equally influential Stephen King, and the argument is well evidenced and convincing. The chapter argues that Lovecraft's Old Ones replicate 'in horrific form the cold, unfathomable judgment of the God of Calvin', already proving the books conjecture that theological approaches to horror can open up new avenues (2019: 27). Syme's chapter draws on earlier work by Ingebretsen to emphasise direct parallels and historical influences from Calvinism into Lovecraft's work, offering a theological perspective that has previously been largely overlooked. As Lovecraft's work is often perceived as distanced from religious belief, and given its prominent influence in the genre across all mediums, Syme's work is a must read for all horror scholars.

The vampire, perhaps the monster most directly associated with religion, is foregrounded in two chapters in this book, each taking a unique approach. Mary Going examines the possible anti-Semitic origins to many of the tropes of vampire fiction, and how it has appropriated anti-Jewish propaganda. This chapter also explores depictions in both literature and film, and links the figure of the vampire with the stories of the Wandering Jew and Cain who are 'often woven together'; both figures are 'punished with immortality'. Whilst Going connects the vampire to the figure of Cain, Rachel Mann's chapter draws direct connections with Jesus Christ. An evocative exploration of 'exciting, queered possibilities for Christian sacramentality', Mann draws on queer theory to explore the monstrous vampiric body (2019: 79). Mann emphasizes that 'Christ's body is no mere heteronormative, white male body of patriarchal fantasies' but 'bears all the marks of torture and crucifixion.... the representations of violation as well as signaling new transformed power' (2019: 82). This powerful, striking interpretation is guaranteed to spark discussion, and forces us to consider the visceral power and affect of horrific imagery within the Bible. Both chapters highlight the book's goals of varied theological approaches to horror, and successfully open up discussions that disavow tired stereotypes of theology as monolithic.

Further chapters cover a range of subjects, from examining the notion of Decadence in Victorian fiction, to the death of God in late twenty-first century horror fiction, to post-colonial interpretations of the Bible. Zoë Lehmann Imfeld argues that authors who seemingly embrace an ideology of either immorality or amorality, are in fact 'seeking an alternate morality' (2019: 58), whilst others try to write within the Decadent tradition whilst still adhering to Christian morality. This chapter makes for interesting reading for anyone exploring the history of how fiction has been seen to have the power to corrupt. Imfeld identifies how Victorian horror texts could be perceived as a lower form of literature, and there are some interesting links that could be drawn with more contemporary criticisms of the value of horror. It provides further illustration of the horror genre's long history of discussions based around morality, and the influence it has on wider society.

Scott Midson explores the impact of technology and cyborgs in a chapter that is likely to spark debate around the degree to which we rely on electronic devices in contemporary culture. Collection editor Eleanor Beal explores the novel *Jonestown*, and its post-colonial themes, which raises discussions of the intersection of horror, religion, and race. Simon Marsden discusses the idea of the 'death of God', a significant idea that remains somewhat nebulous in the myriad of ways it can be defined. Marsden thus explores the variety of ways that the 'death of God' has been interpreted and dealt with across different literary texts. Some offer the potential of hope, and others imply it signals the decline of humanity. The book references widely known literature, including the works of King and Lovecraft, *Frankenstein*, *The Exorcist*, *Interview with the Vampire*, whilst also highlighting less culturally known texts. This broad mix both expands the scope and depth of the book, whilst allowing for some key touchstones that will be familiar to readers new to the field.

Editors Beal and Greenaway have set out to create a collection that reassess 'the place of the religious in dominant histories of Horror and reintegrate marginalized theological and religious lines of enquiry into Horror history'. Greenaway's own chapter highlights this desire, challenging the idea of the gothic as 'an anti-Catholic mode of writing' through a case study of the novels of Andrew Michael Hurley. This pairs well with Syme's early chapter, as both question the established orthodoxy of the genre's relationships and influences from religion.

The final chapter, written by Andrew Tate, brings the collection to a close with a discussion on post-secularism, positioning religion as a human creation. This chapter would make for an excellent starting point for any discussion of humanism and its relationship to theological themes and morality. The variety of subjects covered are unified by their engagement with contemporary issues in culture, with the chapters that look to the past doing so to shine greater light on where society finds itself now. This book will go a long way to convincing those unsure whether horror can offer anything to theological discussion, whilst also offering new openings into under-explored and intriguing areas of study for those who already recognize its importance. Rachel Mann's chapter succinctly epitomizes the theme of the book as a whole; 'religion can no more escape horror, at least in its Christian foundations, than horror can escape religion' (2019: 90). On the evidence of this excellent collection,

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