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HORROR AND RELIGION: NEW LITERARY APPROACHES TO THEOLOGY, RACE AND SEXUALITY (2019) EDITED BY ELEANOR BEAL AND JONATHAN GREENAWAY

Review by Chloe Campbell

Beal, Eleanor and Jonathan Greenaway eds. *Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality*. University of Wales Press, 2019. 222 pp.

In *Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality* (2019), editors Eleanor Beal and Jonathan Greenaway bring together contributors who consider a wide range of Horror and Gothic texts in relation to their engagement with religion and theology. As proposed by Beal and Greenaway in the introductory chapter, the collection adopts a “heterogeneous view on what theology means to different authors in various historical and social contexts” (4). In employing a selection of essays that are diverse and entirely dissimilar in their consideration of how religion can shape a text, the reader is shown how anxieties relating to the dogmatic and the divine emerge as complex and pervasive.

The first three chapters of *Horror and Religion* contemplate theological perspectives relating to eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century texts and constructions. The collection commences with Neil Syme’s essay “‘Headlong into an Immense Abyss’: Horror and Calvinism in Scotland and the United States,” which, in contemplating the influence of Calvinism, Original Sin, and predestination on numerous texts, expertly draws a thread from the works of Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Louis Stevenson, and James Hogg to H. P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, while effectively locating the Calvinist horror present in various texts from *Wieland* (1798) to the *Final Destination* (2000–2011) series. Mary Going’s “The Blood Is the Life: An Exploration of the Vampire’s Jewish Shadow” studies the cultural and theological impact of Christian anti-Semitism upon the construction of the vampire. Going’s close reading of texts like Charlotte Turner Smith’s *Marchmont* (1796), alongside an illuminating commentary on the role of sympathy in the construction of the Jewish-adjacent vampire, makes for a multi-faceted analysis of Horror’s most enduring monster. Though the connection to religion and theology is less immediately comparable in Zoë Lehmann Imfeld’s “Decadent Horror Fiction and *Fin-de-Siècle* Neo-Thomism,” the author contemplates orthodoxy, individualism, and mysticism to suggest how Thomist perspectives are central concerns for the characters in their chosen texts.

The following three chapters lead the reader from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. The second half of the collection continues with Rachel Mann’s “Let the Queer One In: The

Performance of the Holy, Innocent and Monstrous Body in Vampire Fiction.” Mann employs Queer Theory to read the vampire’s body and its redemptive potential in Sheridan le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One In* (2004) while masterfully reading the body of Christ as inherently transgressive. Such an exploration achieves, as the author aims, insight into the “queered possibilities for Christian sacramentality” in Horror texts and Christian-influenced discourses (79). In surmising that the holy and the horrific are wedded, Mann’s question “what response do we make when the holy body is shown to be akin to the vampiric body?” invites further research and contemplation (90). Scott Midson’s “More or Less Human, or Less is More Humane? Monsters, Cyborgs and Technological (Ex)tensions of Edenic Bodies” offers a theological assessment of the cyborg, a relationship that appears indistinct to begin with, but progresses to direct readers’ attention to the concept of *imago dei* and Gothic creation. Following Midson’s discussion of bodies and free will, Simon Marsden’s chapter “Horror and the Death of God” observes Catholic metaphysics in four texts, including William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist* (1971) and Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Marsden contextualises how these novels attempt to reconcile with the absence of, or death of, God, and seamlessly employs intertextual observations which strengthens an already engaging analysis of popular Horror texts in the late twentieth century.

The final three essays in *Horror and Religion* draw upon religious engagement around the millennium and in the post-millennial context. In the collection’s main consideration of a text that engages with religion and postcolonialism, Eleanor Beal’s chapter “Aboriginal Ghosts, Sacred Cannibals, and the Pagan Christ: Consuming the Past as Salvation in Wilson Harris’s *Jonestown*” explores how an individual from a colonised locale negotiates trauma through a religious lens. In analysing Harris’s body of work and its engagement with cannibalism, predatory dogmas, and psychic and spiritual possession, Beal highlights how Horror offers a symbolic language suited to detailing the trauma of “enslavement, colonial occupation, predatory behaviour and religious zealotry” (143). Jonathan Greenaway’s chapter “Reconfiguring Gothic Anti-Catholicism: Faith and Folk Horror in the Work of Andrew Michael Hurley” certainly meets the author’s aim of reconsidering the anti-Catholicism of the Gothic. Through its thorough presentation of the “almost fundamental” Catholic faith in *The Loney* (2015) and *Devil’s Day* (2017), Greenaway’s chapter skilfully details how Hurley’s work “radically challenges the critically widespread conception of the Gothic as a fundamentally anti-Catholic mode of writing” (174). In *Horror and Religion*’s final chapter, “Deliver Us from Evil: David Mitchell, Repetition and Redemption,” Andrew Tate explores how faith, in its various forms, shapes the lives of Mitchell’s characters. From the perspective that many of Mitchell’s critics “rarely prioritise the significance of religious discourse in his fiction” (180), Tate’s analysis remedies this by considering characters’ relationships with Buddhism and theological allegory that is not necessarily Judeo-Christian. Tate’s analysis astutely considers twenty-first century anxieties relating to religion and theology, particularly in reference to post-secularism, humanism, and religion as a human construct.

As a collection, *Horror and Religion* successfully acquaints readers with the myriad ways in which religion, theology, spiritual belief, and dogma have influenced Horror texts since the nineteenth century. Through offering manifold analyses of religion’s impact upon Horror texts,

the edited collection assuredly provides plentiful evidence to support Victor Sage's claim that the "rhetoric of the Horror novel is demonstrably theological" (4). The many astute and precise inferences made throughout the collection will no doubt inspire, and provide a framework for, further research of theological perspectives on both Horror and the Gothic. Most notably, *Horror and Religion* succeeds in both justifying and offering an alternative framework to psychoanalysis when approaching debates within Horror studies. The Horror Studies book series endeavours to expand the field in "innovative and student-friendly ways" (preface) and *Horror and Religion* is imaginative in its approach to analysing texts while remaining accessible for students. The chapters by Going, Mann, Midson, and Marsden include reference to, or analysis of, well-known and often-studied texts like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), and *The Exorcist* (1971), which will be familiar to both undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. The essays explore a range of texts, both well-known and lesser known, which will no doubt introduce a student audience to new material and previously unconsidered parallels between texts. The range of material referenced in *Horror and Religion* does embrace the "multiplicity and plurality of religious and theological engagement," as the editors intended, because the contributing authors employ various perspectives, from Reformation-era theology to considerations of religion and Queer Theory (4). There is the opportunity to further develop the scope of this collection by considering how theology other than Judeo-Christian has impacted and influenced Horror texts.

Though *Horror and Religion* does not analyse Horror fiction in light of one particular theological tradition, most of the essays focus on applying Western theology and Judeo-Christian perspectives to Western Horror texts. While the editors outline that the intention of the collection is to consider Horror texts from perspective of Christian religious and theological criticism, the project could indeed be extended to consider more globalised perspectives (8). Two out of the nine chapters reference religion and theology outside of Judeo-Christian tradition, with Beal's chapter on Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1996) and Tate's chapter on the work of David Mitchell referencing non-Western folklore and Eastern religious belief, respectively. In a future volume, authors could consider the influence of Islamic and Hindu theology on Horror fiction, or the influence of Judeo-Christian theology on non-Western texts, and religion and theology in non-Western texts, more generally. The analysis offered in *Horror and Religion* could be extended to consider Iraqi Horror fiction like Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), Japanese Horror texts like Hideaki Sena's *Parasite Eve* (1995), and Koji Suzuki's *Ring* (1991), or Russian Horror texts like Aleksey Tolstoy's *The Vampire* (1841) and Nikolai Gogol's "Viy" (1835), to name a few examples.

Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality is a must-read text for those who are interested in the impact of Christian theology on literary and popular culture; the evolution of religious thought in the West; constructions of racial Otherness and monstrosity; configurations of, and responses to, deviant and transgressive bodies; the cultural effect of secularism and post-secularism; the Gothic's historic and continued engagement with Christianity; and the holistic study of literary Horror texts. Each essay is thought-provoking in its contemplation of how Horror fiction and religion intersects, offering engaging and accessible studies which reconsider

both old and new texts from varied, diverse perspectives. In successfully considering the influence of Christian theology upon Horror fiction, the volume illuminates interesting avenues for further research into how non-Christian theologies have shaped Western and non-Western Horror texts. Overall, *Horror and Religion* is successful in its intent to interrogate the ways in which religion and theology has maintained a shadowy presence in Horror texts over the centuries.

BIONOTE

Chloe Campbell is a Commissioning Editor working in academic publishing and she is based in the North West of England, UK. Chloe is an MA English Studies student at Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), having participated in their specialised Gothic Studies pathway. Her current research centres on masculinist portrayals of witches in popular culture, with particular focus on the figure of the witch-wife in twentieth-century literature.