Book Reviews

Melissa Croteau and Carolyn Jess-Cooke (eds). *Apocalyptic Shakespeare: Essays on Visions of Chaos and Revelation in Recent Film Adaptations.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. Pp viii, 235.

Apocalyptic Shakespeare takes as its starting point the prevalence of an 'apocalyptic impulse' from 'ancient eschatological doctrines of Zoroaster in Persia, through Judaic and Christian visions of the End, to … *Terminator Salvation: The Future Begins*' (1), and is interested in cinema's engagement with this impulse. It attempts to consider how late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Shakespeare films might be considered in relation to these cultural and cinematic phenomena. This focus is an engaging and timely one for a collection, especially given that, as the editors point out, a turn to the apocalyptic has not received sustained critical examination in the field of Shakespeare on film even though it has been the subject of recent work in cinema studies.

The editors' decision to eschew a 'checklist of requisite characteristics' by which a film might be considered 'apocalyptic' in favour of providing 'several lenses through which the reader or viewer might fruitfully interact with the texts' (2) is apposite given that such definitional and taxonomical approaches can tend toward the reductive and are often easily punctured by counterexamples. Melissa Croteau's work in the introduction to sketch the ways in which terms such as 'apocalypse', 'apocalyptic', 'apocalypticism', and 'post-apocalyptic' can be understood in terms of characteristics and functions provides a useful context for the chapters that follow (1–27). The book designates 'post-apocalypticism as an aspect of the apocalyptic, rather than a separate genre' (6) and the films discussed lend themselves to this more inclusive approach. Croteau notes that 'postmodern theoretical approaches predominate throughout the volume' (12). In casting postmodern theory as 'replete with apocalypticism' (12) Croteau and the essays that follow might,

though, have profitably considered further how 'the revelatory, utopic side of [the] apocalyptic' (13), in which the hidden is revealed, might be squared against the proliferating narratives of postmodern discourse that aim less at this kind of total revelation than at an abandonment of any such possibility. I am sympathetic to the editors' refusal to propose an 'apocalyptic checklist' for the films under consideration so as to 'avoid essentializing this extremely complex phenomenon' (10). In a collection where the 'essays reveal that each film forges its own unique and compelling connections to the apocalyptic that may not fit neatly into any monolithic presentation thereof' (9), however, the focus on the (post-)apocalyptic within some of the chapters and the volume as a whole is not always as clear as it might be, even allowing for an expansive understanding of 'apocalypse as a theoretical and thematic lens' (2).

The most convincing chapters, then, are those that engage directly with apocalyptic discourses, either historical or contemporary, as a way of considering the films under discussion. For example, Ramona Wray effectively addresses the collection's central concerns in her chapter 'The "great doom's image": Apocalyptic Trajectories in Contemporary Shakespearean Filmmaking' (29–46), which examines tensions in several films between a 'dystopian vision of what is to come and, on the other hand, utopian prospects of recovery' (30). So, too, does one of the editors, Carolyn Jess-Cooke, in her persuasive arguments for reading the cinematic genres of prequelization and sequelization in relation to apocalyptic discourses of 'before' and 'after' (216–27). The most engaging chapter of the collection is, however, Adrian Streete's consideration of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (166–80). By placing these films in dialogue with one another Streete neatly teases out the ways in which they evince 'both the spoken and unspoken discourses of anti-Semitic violence that underpin Western apocalyptic thought and that continue to resonate today' (178). Streete thus probes how Radford's film, despite its careful efforts to provide an early modern context for 'the anti-Semitic content of Shakespeare's play for a post-Holocaust audience' (174), is enmeshed in narratives of apocalyptic revelation in which the promise of a new order is predicated on 'one group's religious, moral and social superiority at the expense of another's' (170). Given the range of the collection's themes, including 'technological alienation, spiritual destruction, and the effects of globalization' (2), a brief afterword would have helped to make further connections between the apocalyptic concerns identified by the various chapters.

Among the main strengths of the collection are the lively style of most of the essays and the authors' efforts to locate their Shakespearean case studies in relation to a range of contemporary and historical cinematic counterparts. The collection covers a lot of ground in terms of its range of examples, including some staples of similar collections and undergraduate courses and other works that are, refreshingly, less familiar. Films discussed include *'Macbeth': The Witches' Scene, The Angelic Conversation, Titus, The Postman, William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet,* Jean-Luc Godard's *King Lear,* Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet, The Lion King, The Children's Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The King is Alive,* among others. This generic range is welcome, as is the inclusion of films that might variously fall under the rubric of adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare, such as *The Postman* and *The King Is Alive.* The collection also seeks to widen the Shakespearean frame of reference through Gretchen E. Minton's chapter on Alex Cox's *Revengers Tragedy* (132–47), which situates this film's concerns with 'intersections between the camera, God, and the apocalypse' in relation to 'Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean films' (134). Overall, this collection opens up a productive area of analysis for considerations of Shakespeare on film and many of the individual chapters will prove useful to students working on particular films, especially where these have received limited critical attention. However, given the exciting premise of the book I would have liked an even sharper focus in the selection of chapters in order to offer the kind of 'in depth' examination of 'the increasingly apocalyptic investments and concerns prevalent in contemporary Shakespearean cinema' (2) that the editors sought to provide.

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Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (eds). *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011. Pp 275.

The fourteen scholars who contributed to this collection (including the two editors) offer a variety of arguments about how religion and drama interrelate. Readers will find innovative analyses of highly canonical texts — including Marlowe's *Tamburlaine,* Jonson's *Sejanus,* and ten plays