

## Book Review

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**Laura Copier and Caroline Vander Stichele (eds).** *Close Encounters between Bible and Film: An Interdisciplinary Engagement*. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016, pp. viii + 333, ISBN: 9781628371581 (pbk).

The well-researched essays within this exciting bible-and-film reader are authored by both the up-and-coming and by luminaries of the religion-and-film field, which alone makes it worthy of examination-cum-purchase. The book canvasses silent and sound cinema, old and recent releases, notable and less notable directors from both Hollywood and foreign sources, plus a variety of genres and methodologies creatively deployed. It sits very comfortably alongside *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections between Scripture and Film* (George Aichele and Richard Walsh, eds., 2002), *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology, and the Bible in Film* (Eric S. Christianson, Peter Francis, and William R. Telford, eds., 2005), *The Bible in Film—the Bible and Film* (J. Cheryl Exum, ed., 2006), *Recent Releases: The Bible in Contemporary Cinema* (Geert Hallböck and Annika Hvithamar, eds., 2008), *Images of the Word: Hollywood's Bible and Beyond* (David Shepherd, ed., 2008), *The Bible and Cinema: An Introduction* (Adele Reinhartz, 2013), *The Bible in Motion: A Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception in Film* (Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, ed., 2016), and others.

Structure-wise, it consists of title pages, production details, Contents, Abbreviations, three main parts, and fifteen well-crafted chapters (with footnotes, Works Cited and Films Cited lists as appropriate). The opening section includes an introduction by Laura Copier and Caroline Vander Stichele (pp. 1-9), and 'Film Theory and Biblical Studies' by George Aichele (pp. 11-26). *Part 1: Film Technique as Interpretive Lens* consists of 'The Otrusive Glimpse: Alfred Hitchcock and the Naked Young Man (Mark 14:51-52)' by Larry J. Kreitzer (pp. 29-42); 'On the Harmony of the (Asocial) Gospel: *Intolerance's* Crosscut Stories' by Richard Walsh (pp. 43-77); and 'Reading Biblical Stories with Cinematic Eyes: A Methodological Approach from the Perspective of Transmedial Narratology' by Reinhold Zwick (pp. 79-102). *Part 2: Close Encounters between Texts and Films* includes Michelle Fletcher's "'Behold, I'll Be Back": *Terminator*, the Book of Revelation, and the Power of the Past' (pp. 105-25); "'David's Anger Was Greatly Kindled": Melodrama, the Silent Cinema, and the Books of Samuel' by David Shepherd (pp. 127-53); 'Death and Disaster: *2012 Meets Noah*' by Laura Copier and Caroline Vander Stichele (pp. 155-71); and Tarja Laine's 'Religion as Environmental Ethics: Darren Aronofsky's *Noah*' (pp. 173-83). *Part 3: Interdisciplinary Conversations* contains 'Controversial Mary: Religious Motifs and Conflicting Receptions of Godard's *Je vous salue, Marie*' by Daria Pezzoli-Olgati (pp. 187-208); 'A World of Feeling: The Affect of Lars von Trier and/as Biblical Apocalyptic' by Robert Paul Seesengood (pp. 209-32); Jeffrey L. Staley's 'Martin Scorsese's *Aviator* as Theological Complement to His *Last Temptation of Christ*' (pp. 233-49); Matthew S. Rindge's 'Lusting after Lester's Lolita: Perpetuating and Resisting the Male Gaze in *American Beauty*' (pp. 251-67); 'Objects and the "Extended Self": The Construction of Identity in *Moonrise Kingdom* and the Tabernacle Narratives', by Abigail Pelham (pp.

269-87); and Jeremy Punt's 'The Odds are *Ever* in the Empire's Favor: Postcolonial Subject Positioning in *The Hunger Games*' (pp. 289-313). The closing section includes Contributors, an Index of Ancient Sources and Modern Films, and an Index of Modern Authors and Directors.

Content-wise, Jeremy Punt's *The Hunger Games* essay surprisingly 'contains no overt biblical references...no visible signs of Christian materiality' (p. 290) but rather 'the push and pull of empire' (p. 291) rooted in 'Greek mythology (e.g., the myth of the Minotaur, Asterion, of Crete who regularly received a sacrificial complement of Athenian tributes of boys and girls to feast upon) and Roman gladiatorial games, and from contemporary (live) reality television shows, rather than...biblical motifs... [T]he story is about Rome without Jerusalem' (p. 300). Although valid, competent and interesting, it begs its inclusion in a Bible-film collection. Innovatively, Abigail Pelham's essay about *Moonrise Kingdom* uses research from 'consumer behavior' (p. 274) to link Suzy's possessions that were 'unnecessary to a ten-day camping trip' (p. 274) with 'the instructions given by YHWH to Moses for the building of a portable tent shrine (Exod 25-31)' (p. 269). Again, interesting, but one wanted some (fleeting?) reference to the film's many Noah references (e.g., Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* [*Noah's Flood*], children paired two-by-two in animal costumes, Noah's family aboard a stylized ark, a burst dam, flash floods, and a stained-glass church window depicting Noah's Ark). Jeffrey L. Staley's article showed creativity in coining the term '*kyriosities* (a pun on the Greek word *kyrios*, or "Lord") to describe the kinds of seemingly throwaway profanities (e.g., "Jesus!" "Christ!") that...one often finds in Hollywood films, profanities that...often function as lexical keys for viewers to connect a film's hero or heroine with the broader Jesus story' (p. 237).

Production-wise, the book is scholar-friendly, of good quality printing and binding with forty-three film stills, but disappointingly, *without* a commensurate List of Figures, or an Index of Subjects. Some minor blemishes also exist, notably, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) by Robert Wise (pp. 161, 171) is missing from the Index of...Modern Films (p. 327) although Scott Derrickson's 2008 identically titled version is listed (p. 325). Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) is listed as pages '269-72' (p. 324) whereas the discussion covers pages '269-74' (and beyond), and André Bazin (p. 293) and Siegfried Kracauer (p. 293) are both missing from the Index of Modern Authors (p. 328 and p. 330, respectively), whilst 'Jacob' should be 'James' in Robert Zwick's Mathew 17:1 text, 'Peter, Jacob, and John' (p. 89). Curiously, the films in the Index of...Modern Films are organised under the directors' names (pp. 324-27) and *not* by film title, forcing readers to identify the director first *before* locating the film-cum-page(s), which is cumbersome and redundant because the directors are *already* listed in the Index of...Directors. Furthermore, both indexes eschew the film's release date forcing one to search within the main text to reveal it.

Overall, despite these annoyances, *Close Encounters between Bible and Film: An Interdisciplinary Engagement* is another valuable text competently servicing the religion-and-film field. It is warmly recommended for undergraduates, postgraduates, and the general public alike. One eagerly looks forward to future volumes exploring even more fascinating connections between feature films, ancient Scripture, and modern-day scholarship.

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