***Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race, and Sexuality*, ed. by Eleanor Beal and Jonathan Greenaway**
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Seeking to revisit the long-standing relationship between horror media and the idea of religious faith – a relationship which has been at times as violent and antagonistic as it has been productive – in *Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race, and Sexuality*, Eleanor Beal and Jonathan Greenaway have curated an intensely curious and intriguing collection of essays.

Made up of nine essays, the collection manages, in just over two hundred pages, to confront both the generic conventions of horror as well as the internal machinations of faith from a variety of angles. In their Introduction, the editors open the book with an acknowledgement of the critical scepticism that has fallen over the genre of horror overall, as well as with a nod towards the dearth of theological analyses within horror media. *Horror and Religion* therefore frames the relationship between the horrific and the divine as one of mutual challenge as well as reinforcement. Reaching back to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's comments on Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), the editors introduce what might be called the generalised thesis statement of the entire book: to conjure horror, particularly religious horror, is to create a space of 'theological liminality' in which religion is at once given primacy and challenged – simultaneously degraded and given the platform by which it can re-affirm itself.

In exploring this liminal space of celebration and rejection, *Horror and Religion* explores a variety of texts both classic and modern through a number of lenses, with some more successful than others. In the book's second essay, 'The Blood is the Life: An Exploration of the Vampire's Jewish Shadow', Mary Going explores the ghost of anti-Semitism, which, she argues, has shaped the myth of the vampire over time. Referencing work as diverse as 1796's *Marchmont* by Charlotte Smith and 2015's *He Never Died* (dir. by Jason Kawczyk), Going convincingly charts parallels between the development of the vampire in popular Western culture, and the cultural framings that have also become bound up in anti-Semitic tropes. While some of Going's arguments find themselves on more contested ground – particularly with regards to William Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (1598), a character who is the subject of endless academic discussion – the majority of the arguments given are well supported. The willingness to engage with the Christian origin of certain anti-Semitic tropes presents a welcome sense of critical self-reflection within the collection. There is often a concern, with explicitly faith-based critiques, of a kind of closed-ranks system of religious

protection; *Horror and Religion* evades this trap elegantly through a critical eye of exactly this kind.

Later in the collection, Simon Marsden gives another excellent example of this fearless confrontation of the limits of faith within the context of horror more broadly. Exploring Nietzschean ideas in the essay 'Horror and the Death of God', Marsden engages with both classical and postmodern presentations of horror in a world that has lost faith. While the chapter engages heavily with Christian scholars such as Thomas J. J. Altizer and the attempt to reclaim Nietzsche's famous proclamation in the name of Christianity itself – something which some may see as a particularly shallow form of recuperation – Marsden reaches perhaps one of the highest peaks in the collection with his discussion of the death of God in postmodern literature. The chapter uses Peter Straub's 1990 novella *Mrs God* as the starting point for an intense analysis of symbolism and metaphor, discussing the moment of 'Feuerbachian reversal' within the novel, and engaging with the idea of a theology that actively rejects 'a hierarchical order ruled by a transcendent deity' (p. 131).

Despite these strengths, however, the collection is not devoid of elements that invite critique, the most prominent of which is the limited range of theological origins discussed. While it is inarguably the case that Christianity is represented well and discussed from a variety of perspectives, the implication of *theology* more broadly teased by the title of the book is left somewhat unsatisfied. Going's aforementioned essay regarding depictions of Jewishness in vampire fiction is the most sustained engagement within the collection with a non-Christian faith, and even that is largely explored in the context of the Christian cultural origins of these portrayals. Understandably, given the general Christian nature of theological literature in the West, this is a challenge that is difficult to overcome for writing of this kind. This is therefore a critique that finds no flaw with the authors or editors of the collection itself, but is instead reflective of the historical background of both literary and theological studies in the West.

Beyond this, *Horror and Religion* is an excellent and exciting addition to both the critical discussion on horror itself, and the wider intersection of the genre with religious scholarship. While criticism can be levied upon the scope of the work, and of course contentious claims are made throughout, the level of theological scholarship on display combined with the intensity of engagement with the horror tradition makes for a uniquely intriguing read, which would not only be of interest to the specialist, but also would make a fantastic introduction to this rich intersection of disciplines. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the collection introduces a number of questions about both of the titular areas of

study that demand further academic engagement, laying the ground for the continued development of the field in productive and challenging ways.

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