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**Richard Walsh (ed.), T&T Clark Companion to the Bible and Film, T&T Clark, London, 2018, pp. 432, 9780567666208, £130, HB.**

This is a very timely and prescient edited collection which charts the growth of, and new challenges within, the field of biblical film criticism over recent decades. Recognizing that it has ‘come of age’, the editor, Richard Walsh, notes in the introduction how, from its homiletical and theological beginnings, the discipline has now embraced the rudiments of film theory, with chapters dedicated to the importance of “semiotics, cultural studies, ideological criticism, and reception criticism” (p3) in addition to a more traditional focus on film text and narrative. As Laura Copier attests in Chapter 13, “if one wants to engage with film, analyze it, interpret it, some, however rudimentary, grasp of aesthetic form is indispensable” (p169), to the point, indeed, that “For any lasting and meaningful engagement between Bible and film, attentiveness and a willingness to linger over the questions and obstacles posed by the form of film itself are indispensable” (p171).

Crucially, there is an acknowledgement that, in line with postmodern discourse, it is no longer the case that audiences or scholars are privileging Scripture over film – “a generation now reads Exodus (if at all) through the formative lens of *The Prince of Egypt*” (p4) and that for many *The Passion of the Christ* is Scripture! Accordingly, moving on from debates as to whether we can find the ‘Bible in film’, Walsh tantalizingly explores the possibility of looking at ‘film as Bible’. Rejecting normative or static readings, the contributors to this fascinating and diverse collection “resist the tyranny of the one, approved approach” and, in its place, explore the necessarily “political, interested, identity-constructing nature of all interpretation” (p13).

The book is sub-divided into three sections – Contexts, Theories and Texts – and includes a groundbreaking study by Michelle Fletcher into the way scholarship on apocalypticism and film noir can “enter a productive partnership and hold up a mirror to each other, albeit somewhat darkly” (p21). What distinguishes this chapter is the way in which, in tandem with Walsh’s aims, there is no attempt to suggest that the Book of Revelation is noir or that noir is implicitly bearing witness to biblical precepts or ideas relating to the end of the world. It is the symbiotic and dialogical relationship between the two which enables both film and biblical scholars to have a conversation in which both can learn from the other, predicated on a respectful and erudite conversation and interaction with two feet firmly entrenched in both scholarly camps.

In other chapters there is an awareness of the extent to which biblical films should no longer mirror ‘authoritative’ histories but that filmmakers “create their historical interpretations out of images and sound” (Anne Moore, p37) – and they are no less authentic for that. Dwight H. Friesen also contributes an instructive chapter which mirrors the ‘turn to the self’ and ‘subjective turn’ dynamics in wider theological discourse, with reference to what Bible films “can reveal about how people negotiate the Bible’s significance in daily practice” (p104). We see similar dynamics in Robert Paul Seesengood’s contribution which argues that “how a work makes its reader/viewer feel, and the cognition and tactility of feeling itself, are legitimate critical interests” (p175).

More critically, James G. Crossley contributes a revealing study of the interrelationship between the stages of capitalism in spaghetti westerns and the Christian Bible, while George Aichele is concerned that most Bible films “simply reaffirm the prevailing paranoid signifying regime of Western capitalism” (p246). In her analysis, Rhiannon Graybill documents how, when it comes to gender and sexuality, “films based upon the Bible repeat

and reinscribe traditional representations” (p195), in their focus on male protagonists and masculinity. As a counterpoint, though, there is the fascinating claim made by Matthew Page that “while it is commonly assumed that our own era gives women the greatest voice, in this field the data does not bear this out” (p273) – with approximately half of the scriptwriters and editors of Bible films in the silent era being female.

This is a genuinely dialogical and interdisciplinary collection which covers and breaks new ground, and it deserves to be embraced by a wide academic and lay readership.

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